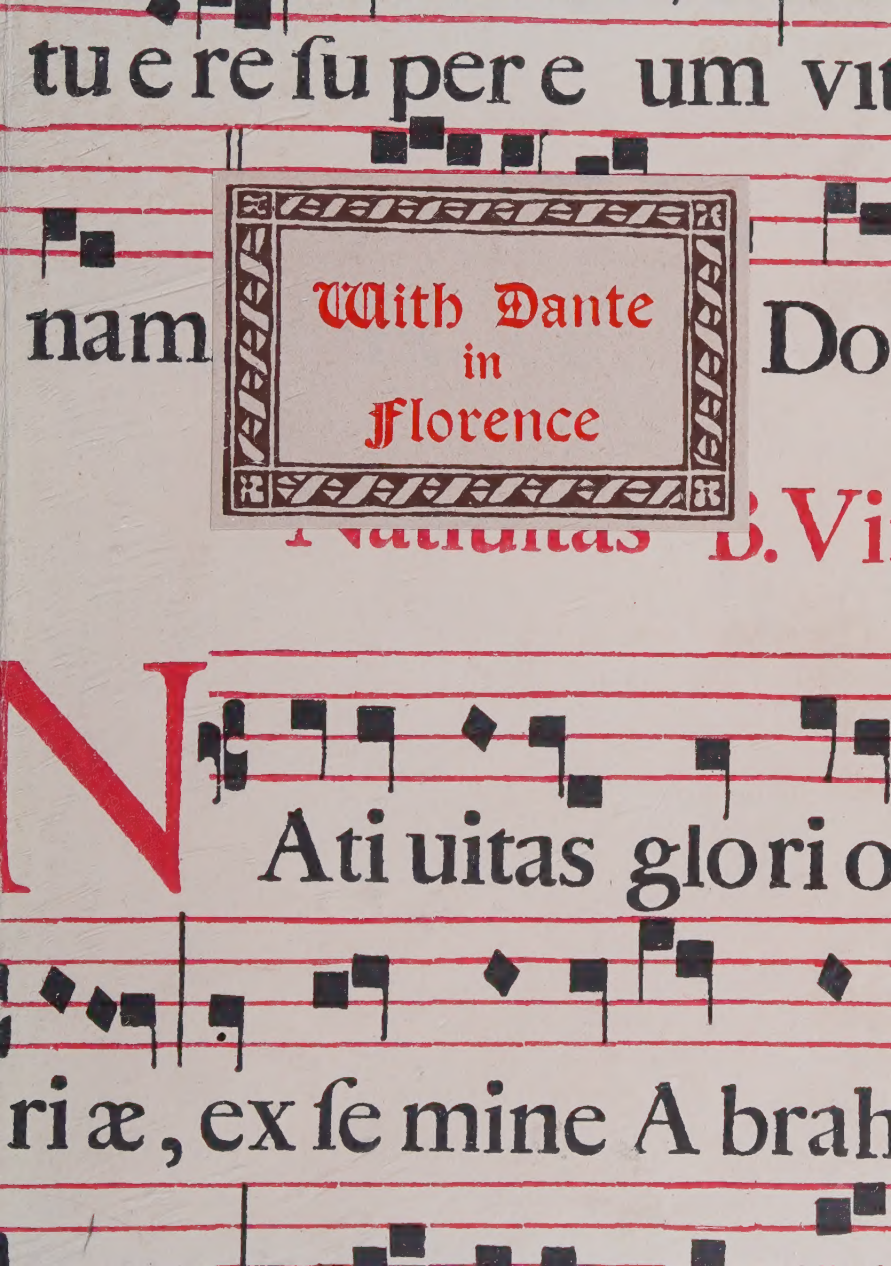
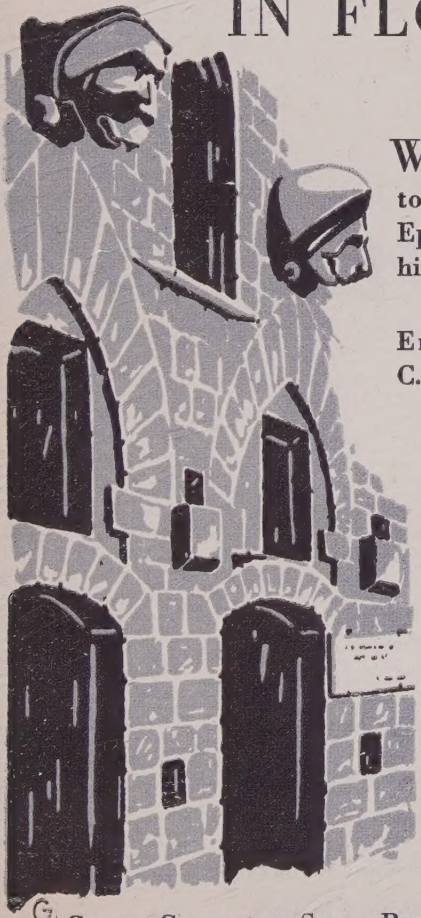


With Dante in Florence

AMERIGO PARRINI

WITH DANTE IN FLORENCE



Walks in Florence to places marked by Epigraphs recalling the history of Dante's day

English version by C. DANYELL TASSINARI

Illustrated

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He who works for Dante, works for Italy, Christianity and the world.

GLADSTONE.

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TO THE READER

Fai come quei che la cosa per nome
Apprende ben, ma la sua quiditate
Veder non puote, s'altri non la prome.

PARADISO, XX – 91-93.

[" *Thou doest as he doth who a thing by name*
Well apprehendeth, but its quiddity
Cannot perceive unless another show it "].

Longfellow's translation.

This book has been written to explain the meaning of the thirty-one Dantesque Epigraphs affixed to old buildings in Florence, each one recalling some great deed or famous name of Florentine history, at a period when the glorious destinies of our restless, energetic Commune were closely connected with the destinies of Italy. These deeds and names have been immortalised by the Poet in words so concise and full of obscure allusions that it is not easy at first sight to grasp their entire significance unless one has a more than superficial knowledge of the Divine Comedy.

With a view of being helpful both to my own countrypeople and to foreigners, and of making the voice of Dante ring clear in the streets and

squares of his native city, I have undertaken the task of lifting " il velame de li versi strani " [" *the veil of the mysterious verses* " Inferno, IX - 63].

I have endeavoured to be at once precise and comprehensive and if both in the text and in the notes, I quote from writers of all epochs and indulge in historical and artistic reminiscences which go beyond the strict limit of my subject, I think my readers will not regret the additional light thus thrown on Dante, his city and his period.

AMERIGO PARRINI.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

In the year 1900, in celebration of the sixth centenary of Dante's Priorate, the Commune of Florence began affixing Dantesque Epigraphs to mediaeval buildings in the central streets and squares of the city. The task of selection was placed in the hands of a Commission composed of Senator Isidoro del Lungo, Marchese Pietro Torrigiani, Conte Giuseppe Lando Passerini, Prof. Orazio Bacci, Guido Carocci, Attilio Formilli and Luigi Minuti.

These Epigraphs, although chosen with great historical and literary acumen from the terzine *of the Divine Poem, have always been difficult of comprehension, not only to foreigners but even to Florentines themselves. A few years ago an American writer, Ida Riedisser, wrote a short English commentary on the verses, for the benefit of her fellow-countrypeople, which was afterwards translated into Italian by Prof. Licurgo Cappelletti. We venture to think, however, that all the ground has not been covered, and that*

this new publication by Prof. Amerigo Parrini, will be welcomed both by English and Italian students of Florentine history.

The object of the work is clearly set forth in the Author's Preface. The reader, as he turns these pages, will find not only an exact linguistic explanation of the Epigraphs themselves, but a variety of interesting facts and details of Florentine life in the middle-ages. The numerous illustrations reproducing old sites and monuments which either no longer exist or have been transformed and modernized, will help to give a more complete understanding of Dante's times and Dante's Florence.

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Epigraph I. – FILIPPO ARGENTI.

TUTTI GRIDAVANO: "A FILIPPO ARGENTI!"
E IL FIORENTINO SPIRITO BIZZARRO
IN SÈ MEDESMO SI VOLGEA CO' DENTI.

– DANTE – INF. 'VIII' 61–63 –

They all were shouting, "at Filippo Argenti!"
And that exasperate spirit Florentine
Turned round upon himself with his own teeth.

Longfellow's translation.

In Via del Corso, No. 14, where the houses of the Adimari family once stood.

In this *terzina* Dante refers to one of his many enemies, Filippo Argenti dei Cavicciuli, who belonged to a branch of the Adimari family. He was a rich knight, so rich that he had the horse he used to ride shod with silver, a piece of vainglory which earned him the nickname of " Argenti ".

" *He was a tall, dark man, muscular and of great strength, but he never did a single good action in his life, but was always proud and arrogant* ". He was Dante's political adversary and it is said that on one occasion, having come to words with the Poet, he boxed his ears and after that " *there was ever great enmity between them* ". When Dante was in exile and a wanderer throughout Italy, Filippo Argenti fiercely and persistently opposed his return to Florence because, as some affirm, a connection of his own, Boccaccio Cavicciuli Adimari, had entered into possession of the property confiscated from the Poet [1] when he was banished from the city

like a common malefactor, on January 27th., 1302 [new style] [2] by the Podestà of Florence, Cante de' Gabbrielli of Gubbio.

In his fantastic journey through the lower world, Dante imagines a meeting with Filippo Argenti in the V Circle of the Inferno, where the "*iracondi*" ["*choleric*"] were immersed in the marshy Styx "*come porci in brago*" ["*like swine in mire*"], condemned to vent their rage eternally on one another. Argenti tries to insult Dante but the latter answers him haughtily and Virgil, the Poet's spiritual guide, thrusts him back into the mud, saying: "*Via costà, con gli altri cani!*" ["*Away there with the other dogs!*"]. A few moments later, some of Argenti's fellow-sufferers fling themselves on him, crying out: "*A Filippo Argenti!*".

In other words: They all cried out: "Give it to Filippo Argenti" and the irascible Florentine [*bizzarro in those days meant one who lost his temper for the least thing*] not being able to vent his anger on others, turned on himself and gnawed his hands with rage.

NOTES.

[1] Through party hatred, Dante was accused of barratry (*fraud and corrupt practices in office*) and treachery; he was condemned to pay a fine of 5000 florins and to be

banished beyond the borders of the Republic. He had no opportunity of defending himself, being absent at the time in Rome, with two other fellow-citizens, on an embassy to Pope Boniface VIII, to protest against the Papal policy towards their city and to avert, if possible, the entry into Florence of Charles of Valois, as the Pope's Vicar-General and peacemaker.

But while the other two ambassadors, Maso Minerbetti and Corazza Ubaldini da Signa, returned at once to Florence, at the conclusion of their mission, bearers of the humiliating conditions imposed by the Pope, Dante, it would seem, lingered for another four months at the Papal Court, either in Rome or at Anagni. He was finally on his way home when, on March 10th., 1302 (*new style*) he was made aware that a second and still more severe sentence had been pronounced against him, including the confiscation of his property and the demolition of his house, while he himself was to be burnt alive should he ever attempt to re-enter Florence! All this on the specious pretext that he had failed to appear before his judges!

This episode of Dante's political activity still awaits elucidation, for it lacks documentary corroboration and historians are not agreed in their views. Gino Capponi, in his "History of the Florentine Republic" writes: "*What happened while Dante was in Rome as ambassador, and during his further stay which was prolonged until January of the following year* [1302], *we do not know. His exile was not decreed by the Pope but something that has never been made clear must have occurred between them which, while it roused great indignation against him in Florence, caused the Poet himself to feel deeply injured. Hence his desire to be revenged*".

This point of view would almost lead us to believe that Boniface VIII who, from the early days of his Pontificate, had never ceased interfering in Florentine affairs, and

who, perhaps, dreaded Dante as his most determined adversary, had purposely detained the Poet in Rome, to prevent him from upsetting the Papal plans in Florence, and possibly preventing the entry of Charles of Valois who, under the guise of a peacemaker, was to crush the liberties of the citizens and establish the predominance of the Black or Papal party. The Pope had all the more reason to fear this, as Dante had never made any secret of his patriotic opposition to the Court of Rome.

[2] The exact date of Dante's exile has given rise to many discussions between Dante scholars, owing to the fact that in the middle ages, the year did not begin everywhere at the same season. This has led to numerous chronological errors and it is still often difficult to place the year as given in ancient documents, in relation with the modern calendar in which, as everyone knows, the civil year is regulated by the solar year and goes from January Ist. to December 31st. The Florentines and the Sienese, for instance, began their civil year *ab incarnatione*, that is, on March 25th., the Feast of the Annunciation. Therefore, according to the *calculus florentinus*, the year began two months and twenty-five days later than the solar year. The Pisans, on the other hand, began the year *a nativitate*, that is, on December 25th., Christmas Day, anticipating the common or solar year by seven days.

The reformation of the Calendar was undertaken by Pope Gregory XIII who issued a brief in 1582 abolishing the ancient Calendar and replacing it by the one still in use, known as the Roman style, which was definitely confirmed in 1691 by Pope Innocent XII. In spite of its undoubted advantages over all previous systems, the pratical application of the new Calendar throughout the civilised world, was very slow. It met with much opposition, culminating even in strife and bloodshed, chiefly on political and religious grounds.

In Tuscany both the old styles were abolished in 1749 by the Grand Duke Francis II of Lorraine, and the Roman style came into use on January Ist. 1750. Affixed on the wall of the Loggia in Piazza della Signoria, is a marble tablet with an inscription by Giovanni Lami recording this important decree and stating that the reformation of clocks took place at the same date: that is, they were to mark the 24 hours that make up the astronomical day, couting from 12 to 12; from midnight to midday and from mid-day to the following midnight, according to present custom.

Fragment
of the mosaic pavement of the Baptistery.
(See Epigraph VII).

Epigraph II. – GUIDO CAVALCANTI·

. . . . . "SE PER QUESTO CIECO
CARCERE VAI PER ALTEZZA D'INGEGNO,
MIO FIGLIO OV' È? E PERCHÈ NON È TECO?"

ED IO A LUI: "DA ME STESSO NON VEGNO:
COLUI CHE ATTENDE LÀ, PER QUI MI MENA,
FORSE CUI GUIDO VOSTRO EBBE A DISDEGNO".

– DANTE – INF. 'X' 58–63 –

. . . . . "If through this blind
Prison thou goest by loftiness of genius,
Where is my son? And why is he not with thee?"

And I to him: "I come not of myself;
He who is waiting yonder leads me here,
Whom in disdain perhaps your Guido had".

Longfellow's translation.

In via Calzaioli, n. 5, where the remains of part of the Cavalcanti houses can still be seen (1).

The second of these two *terzine* is not very easy to understand and it has given rise to many different interpretations. In the VI circle of the Inferno, where the heretics and

> " *With Epicurus all his followers*
> *Who with the body mortal make the soul* "

(that is, who deny the immortality of the soul) are condemned to lie in burning graves, Dante, guided by the spirit of Virgil, meets Cavalcante, father of Guido Cavalcanti, who was a gallant knight, a poet " *in the sweet new style* ", and one of the distinguished scholars and philosophers of his day (2).

Dante was strongly attached to Guido " *whom I call* ", he wrote " *the first among my friends* ", but they differed on principles of religion and philosophy.

Dante was eminently a Christian; Guido, if we are to believe contemporary witnesses, had heretical tendencies and was commonly reputed - like many others of his time, especially among the Ghibellines - to be a Paterian (3) and an

Epicurean (4). It is unnecessary to recall Dante's love and admiration for Virgil whom he calls "*famous Sage*", and "*that benignant Sage, who all things knew*", and whose works may be almost defined as a link between classical paganism and mediaeval Christianity (5).
Dante emphasizes this admiration from the beginning of his Poem when he first meets the shade of the great Latin Poet, on the threshold of his adventurous journey to the lower world and Purgatory, and addresses him in the well-known words of affectionate enthusiasm:

> "*Thon art my master and my author thou,*
> *Thou art alone the one from whom I took*
> *The beautiful style that has done honour to me*".

Everyone knows that certain details of the *Inferno* were copied by Dante from the Æneid, the famous Poem of his favourite "*ancient Poet*", in which, apart from its admirable style, he found deep moral teaching, a synthesis of the doctrines of the classical pagan world and the exaltation and consecration of the glorious history of Rome and the grandeur of the Empire. And as the purity of the man and his work and the unconscious prophesy of Christianity deduced from his famous lines, thus rendered by Dante,

> ". . . . . *The age renews itself,*
> *Justice returns, and man's primeval time,*
> *And a new progeny descends from heaven*" –

drew Virgil, in the eyes of the Italian Poet, very near to Christianity, so his glorification of the Roman Empire and its origin and of the "*good Augustus*", made him the source from which Dante drew his own political ideal of universal monarchy (6).

These reasons are sufficient to explain why Dante chose Virgil as his guide in his allegorical journey through the two realms of expiation. What means, therefore, the reference to Guido's disdain? Commentators, ancient and modern, have cudgelled their brains to find an answer to this questions, each one giving a different interpretation, some of which are puerile and unfounded and altogether unworthy of the moral altitude of the Poet.

It is absurd, for instance, to suppose that Cavalcanti, enamoured of the vulgar tongue which he defended so admirably and in which he wrote so well, should have disdained Virgil because the latter was a Latin poet; as though Virgil, born 19 years before Christ, could possibly have written in any other language save the one spoken at that time throughout all the Roman Empire. Nor is it any more reasonable to suggest that Cavalcanti, a Guelph, disdained Virgil as the singer and exalter of the divine origin of the Empire.

We give our readers the opinion of that great Dante scholar, the late Professor Isidoro Del

Lungo, whose writings have been of great help in interpreting some of the most difficult Epigraphs, and who seems to us, on this point, one of the most enlightened modern commentators of the Divine Comedy.

"As to the reasons for this disdain, commentators have made very superficial assertions, and hardly one of them seems to realize what a profound meaning the verse acquires, if it is referred, not to Virgil in a literal sense, but to the allegorical Virgil of the Poem, the "power supreme" guiding Dante through the "impious circles", as we read at the beginning of the Canto, and if we remember that this Power [or Reason] to which Dante has submitted his own intellect [the journey is a purely intellectual conception] is in its turn moved by a greater Power [Faith]. "Beatrice am I who do bid thee go". Dante does not go by himself; he is led by Reason subdued by Faith, and therefore is it that God grants him the privilege to visit the eternal regions, like Aeneas and St. Paul. Reason dominated by Faith is the Virgil that Guido Cavalcanti, imbued with the paternal heresies, holds in disdain, not the poet Virgil, not Virgil the Latin. But that merciful "perhaps" shows us that Dante was not so fully convinced of his friend's heresy as of that of his friend's father and as the whole incident recalls the youthful friendship between the two

poets, to which the "Vita Nuova" bears witness, that affectionate doubt would lead us to think that when they were together, Dante and Guido frequently conversed and disputed about the higher destinies of the human spirit, about the world and about God, and that in those talks Guido showed himself obstinate in his unbelief and in his refusal to bow down to Dante's mystic Virgil".

If it be permitted to add anything further to the opinion of the distinguished Dantist, we may point out that Dante held nothing to be more contrary to Reason or Human Wisdom than the negation of God and the immortality of the soul, an opinion clearly voiced in the *Convivio* (Book II, Chap. VIII), where he writes: *"I say that of all follies, the greatest, vilest and most harmful is that which teaches that after this life there is none other; for, if we turn to the writings of philosophers and other wise writers, they all agree in this - that in us is something that is eternal".* Folly in Dante's mind, as in that of others, is always the opposite of Reason.

In other words: If it is by loftiness of genius [says Guido Cavalcanti's father] that you are able to go through this blind prison [that is, to accomplish a journey forbidden to the living]

where is my son and why is he not with you? [wondering not to see them together, because convinced that his son's genius is in no way inferior to that of Dante]. And Dante answers: I come not of myself [that is, not only through the strength of my intellect, which would not be sufficient] but led here by him who awaits me yonder, Virgil [pure reason rekindled by God and resuscitated in Dante] that Virgil whom perhaps your son had in disdain [Reason and true Wisdom, voices to which Guido would not give heed].

NOTES.

[1] Although the houses of the Cavalcanti extended as far as the present Via dei Calzaioli, their principal nucleus with the loggia and tower known as "del Gallo", lay between Via di Calimala, the Sdrucciolo di Or San Michele – now Via dell'Arte della Lana – and that part of Via Porta Rossa formerly called Via Cavalcanti and more recently "Baccano".

[2] Guido Cavalcanti who was born about the middle of the 13th. century and died in 1300, was a superb figure of an ancient Florentine, uniting to a firm and unyielding character, all the depth and acumen of philosophical thought and the power of expressing all the most tender and delicate feelings of love in the *new style*. We possess many of his songs, ballads and sonnets. He disdained to write in Latin and encouraged Dante to write in the vulgar tongue.

As a citizen he was by birth an aristocrat and remained so all his life, never resigned to the predominance of democracy and preferring to keep aloof from public offices rather than submit to popular impositions by inscribing himself, like Dante, on the roll of one of the Arts. In the strife between Blacks and Whites, he took the side of the latter; he was therefore an enemy of Corso Donati who, just as he used to call Vieri dei Cerchi "l'asino di Porta" [Porta San Piero i. e. the donkey of the gate], would also speak of Guido contemptuosly as *Cavicchia* or "*the bolt*", in reference, perhaps, to the obstinacy and stubbornness of his character. On account of his fierce party-spirit, Guido Cavalcanti was banished during Dante's Priorate [*June-August, 1300*] to Sarzana in the Lunigiana where he was seized by malarial fevers. The commune having given him permission to return to Florence, he did so, broken alike in mind and body, and died shortly afterwards. Guido Cavalcanti was married to Bice degli Uberti, daughter of Farinata [*see Epigraph III*] to whom he had been betrothed from childhood, to promote a reconciliation between two families of opposite parties.

The Trebbio Column.

[3] The Patarini or Patarians were on of the many heretic sects that overspread Europe in the XI century; they were especially numerous in Italy and in Tuscany where they made their headquarters at Florence. Their doctrines were in opposition to the Christian religion and aimed at shaking off subjection to the Church and to Princes; therefore, wherever they appeared, there were riots, tumults and assassinations. The institution of the so-called, Tri-

bunals of the Holy Inquisition dates from this period, their object being to counteract and destroy heretics. The granite column surmounted by a Cross that stands in the Piazza del Trebbio – and is the work, some say, of Giovanni Pisani – was placed there in 1308 to commemorate the sanguinary defeat inflicted a century earlier on the Paterini by the faithful of Florence, under the leadership of Fra Pietro da Verona, better known as St. Peter Martyr. The somewhat sibylline inscription engraved in Gothic characters round the capital of the column does not confirm this story which is based on what S. Antonino [Archbishop of Florence, 1446–1459] wrote about the desperate struggles with heretics which took place in the 13th. century.
Various explanations are given as to the origin of the word "trebbio". Some consider it to be a deformation of the Latin *trivium* or place where three roads meet; others say that it is derived from *tripudium* and that a circus or theatre once stood on this site; others again hold that "trebbio" is an alteration of *tribo*, from the Latin *tribus*, a name given to the quarter where the Romans were wont to hold a census of the citizens, to find out their means and position and all about their families.

[4] Followers of the celebrated Greek philosopher, Epicurus, who died 270 years before Christ. He was the founder of the Epicurean school of philosophy which held pleasure to be the highest good and denied the immortality of the soul. Those who in Dante's day were believed, rightly or wrongly, to deny the immortality of the soul, were improperly called Epicureans.

[5] Publius Virgilius Maro, the prince of Latin poets, as he is commonly called, was born at Andes – now Pietole – a village near Mantua, on October 15th. in the year

70 B. C., during the joint consulship of Pompeius Magnus and Licinius Crassus. His youth was spent in the country near Cremona and having devoted himself to study, he became deeply learned "in every art and science". Although he frequented the corrupt Roman society of his day, Virgil remained uncontaminated. He lived first at Cremona, then at Rome where he enjoyed the friendship and protection of Mecaenas and the Emperor Augustus. He dwelt for some time at Naples and Sorrento and in the year 19 B. C. he travelled to Greece. Here, at Athens, he met the Emperor Augustus returning from the East and was persuaded to accompany him back to Rome. Before this could take place, however, Virgil fell ill at Megara. At his own request he was conveyed back to Italy and landed at Brindisi where he died in the autumn of the same year, at the age of 51. He left directions that his body was to be taken to Naples and buried at the second milestone from the city, on the road to Pozzuoli. It is said that just before his death, Virgil composed his own epitaph in the following distich:

MANTUA ME GENUIT, CALABRI RAPUERE, TENET NUNC
PARTHENOPE, CECINI PASCUA, RARA, DUCES.

This being translated, means: *Mantua gave me birth, Calabria snatched me avay, now Parthenope holds me: I sang of the pastures, the green fields and the heroes.* [In the Bucolics or Eglogues, pastoral idylls; the Georgics, a poem on agriculture, and the Aeneid, a heroic poem]. It is said that Virgil was somewhat countrified in his person, retiring and timid by nature and of feeble health. He was intimate with all the great personages of his day; and was a devoted friend of Horace, while Ovid praises his virtues and mild disposition.

Popular imagination in the middle ages wove a halo of occultism round Virgil's name. He was looked upon almost as a wizard and a magic efficacy was attributed

to verses taken from his works [*sortes Vergilianae*]. Today, Virgil is not relegated solely to the realm of cold, classical literature nor is he confined to the frigid atmosphere of class-rooms and universities. Italy in her renewed vigour and sense of patriotism, hails Virgil, not only as the poet of the Georgics, who sang of the cultivation of the fields, the fertility of the soil, the disciplined industry of the bees and all the many beauties and divine gifts of our land, but as the inspirer of national aspirations, the Caesarian poet of the Aeneid – that wonderful poem, given to the world after his death, announced to the people of Rome by Propertius and Petrarch's companion in his dying hour – which tells of the legendary and historical traditions of Rome, proclaims the grandeur and dominating power of the Eternal City and sings the splendour of the Julian Line and the glorious founders of the Roman Empire.

Santa Margherita
Beatrice's Parish Church.
(see Epigraph VII).

[6] Besides the Comedy since called "Divine" Dante wrote a number of lyrical poems which were collected after his death under the name of the "Canzoniere di Dante", and of which he himself commented not a few in the "Vita Nuova" [his own love-story] and in the "Convito" a philosophical treatise. He also composed a Latin dissertation on the new Italian language, "De Vulgari Eloquio" and another Latin work "De Monarchia" in which he endeavoured to revive and strengthen in his contemporaries, a sense of the need for and universality of the Holy Roman Empire.

Epigraph III. – FARINATA DEGLI UBERTI.

. . . . . "FU' IO SOL COLÀ, DOVE SOFFERTO
FU PER CIASCUN DI TORRE VIA FIORENZA,
COLUI CHE LA DIFESI A VISO APERTO".

– DANTE – INF. 'X' 91–93 –

But there I was alone, where every one
Consented to the laying waste of Florence,
He who defended her with open face.

Longfellow's translation.

In the first courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio, on the right-hand wall beneath the arcade.

In the VI circle of the Inferno, among the heresiarchs and "their disciples of all sects", where "like together with its like is buried", Dante meets one of the bitterest enemies of his own ancestors, Manente degli Uberti, called Farinata [1], condemned, as an Epicurean, to lie in a burning grave [see Epigrap II].
In the brief dialogue that ensues between them, Dante, as a good Guelph, mindful of the defeat of Montaperti [2], reminds the proud Ghibelline, with dignified severity, of "the slaughter and great carnage which.... with crimson stained the Arbia" on the fateful day when the Florentine Guelphs were betrayed and put to rout by the Florentine Ghibellines. Farinata tries to exculpate himself from blame, saying "There was I not alone", and brings forward in his own defence, the magnanimous act accomplished at Empoli [3] where he really was "alone" in saving Florence from destruction. This did not suffice, however, after subsequent Guelph victory,

to save Farinata from vindictive persecution from his fellow-citizens, constantly renewed against him and his descendants "in each one of their laws". [See Epigraph XIX].
Dante's words, placed in the mouth of Farinata, reveal the genuine admiration felt by the Poet for the man who, although of an opposite party, did not hesitate to raise his voice and his sword in defence of their common country. These verses, full of beauty and ispiration, have handed down to posterity the noble figure of the Florentine hero over whose tomb [4], long since buried beneath the foundations of Santa Maria del Fiore, Brunelleschi's superb cupola casts its peaceful shade [5].

In other words: There [at Empoli] where everyone [that is, all the Ghibelline exiles banded together with the enemies of Florence] agreed [tolerated, consented] that Florence should be laid waste [destroyed], I alone defended her with open face [that is, with firm courage, putting myself openly and resolutely against the opinion of all the others].

NOTES.

[1] This Ghibelline by birth who, from his youth upward had taken part in the stormy vicissitudes of his family involved for many years in party strife, was one of those who in 1243 caused the Guelphs to be exiled from Florence.

He afterwards became head of his party and was himself banished from Florence ten years later. He took up his residence at Siena, a city noted for its Ghibelline sympathies and made use of his high authority and his powerful intellect to try and effect the restoration of the Florentine Ghibellines to their native city. "He was a great man and farseeing, gifted with a powerful mind, a brave fighter and fertile in stratagems". So much did Farinata say and do and so craftily did he lay his plans, that Florence, caught in a thick web of political intrigues and above all, deceived as to the enemy's real strength, declared war on Siena, a war wich ended in the terrible defeat of Montaperti from which it seemed as if Florence could never recover.

[2] This famous battle took place on September 4th., 1260, in Val di Biena, four miles distant from Siena, where the river Arbia flows past the Montaperti hills from which the encounter took its name. On the one side were the Sienese with a strong army of 25,000 men, including 2000 exiled Ghibellines, 800 German knights sent by King Manfred, and small contingents from Pisa and Cortona; on the other side were the Florentine Guelphs with an army of 30,000 foot and 3000 horse, representing the flower of the citizens, numerous *popolani* who were fighting under the standards of their Companies and strong reinforcments from the cities of the Guelph League, such as Arezzo, Lucca, Orvieto, Arezzo, Volterra, Prato, Pistoia, etc.
It was the finest army that the city had ever sent forth but it contained, unfortunately, the germ of treason, for the Florentine Guelphs had thought it prudent to take with them, enrolled in tbe Companies – sooner than leave then behind in the defenceless town – those members of the Ghibelline party who had obtained leave to remain n Florence. These treacherous citizens, their minds set

on revenge, had received secret orders from Farinata degli Uberti, to desert at the first favourable opportunity.
Fighting began at dawn and continued all day, the Florentines making a steadfast resistance. At the hour of vespers neither side could be said to have obtained a decided advantage over the other, when suddenly the Florentine knights saw the Ghibellines whom they had brought into the fight, break from the ranks and pass over to the enemy, while the Germans came up and thrust

The Hill of Montaperti.

themselves among the panic-stricken Companies. The heat was very great and the sun, now sinking to the west, dazzled the eyes of the Florentine troops whose standard was borne aloft by Jacopo Pazzi, a very brave knight. At this moment, the Florentine Ghibelline, Bocca degli Abati, vilest of traitors, spurred his horse against Pazzi, and cut off his right hand which fell together with the standard. [See Epigraph IX]. This treacherous act spread terror among the Guelph ranks; they wavered and gave way, leaving the victory to the Sienese and the exiles. Tho struggle went on till sunset and there was great slaughter of the fugitives and of those Guelphs who stood their ground desperately to the last.
The losses on both sides were enormous. Some historians state that the killed numbered from ten to fifteen thousand;

others give a still higher figure. Of the auxiliary troops, those from Lucca, Arezzo and Orvieto suffered most.
Villani says that 2,500 Florentine Guelphs were killed, 1,500 wounded and the rest dispersed. Modern writers consider these figures to be erroneous or wilfully given below the real number. Even Villani, however, cannot hide the gravity of the defeat and he admits that the *Carroccio* and the *Martinella* [the pride of every army in those days] were captured "with innumerable booty from the Florentines and their allies. And thus the ancient Florentine people were put to rout and annihilated, who had won so many victories and enjoyed such power and state for ten years".

[3] Farinata, satisfied with his victory, disdained to carry it to extremes and gave orders that the easy pursuit of the flying Guelphs should cease.
Shortly afterwards at Empoli, when the Ghibelline chiefs, drunk with victory and blinded by party hatred, urged the total destruction of Florence, Farinata defended his birthplace in a few plain words, without any of the highsounding speeches put into his mouth by historians, but with such determination and patriotic fervour that he brought the others over to his way of thinking and the iniquitous suggestion was dropped.
On his return to Florence, Farinata continued to be a partisan of King Manfred, a powerful supporter of the Ghibelline cause, and fought for him against the Guelphs who had taken refuge in Lucca. After this episode, history is silent about Farinata and we know nothing further of his career.

[4] This ardent patriot did not die in exile as some chroniclers have asserted but at Florence, on the 27th. of April, 1264, when little over fifty years of age. He was buried in the cemetery of Santa Reparata, the old

cathedral of Florence [See Epigraph VII], over which the new cathedral, afterwards called Santa Maria del Fiore, was built in 1294.

To remove all possible doubt on the subject, we will mention that "while Dante was still young and 19 years after the bones of the Uberti family had been resting peacefully in the cemetery of Santa Reparata, Fra Salomone da Lucca, Inquisitor of heretical depravity, solemnly brought an action against the Ghibelline leader and his wife Adaletta, and, condemning them as heretics, ordered that their bones should be separated from those of the faithful and that their property should be confiscated and sold". [Barbi]. There is no proof that this foolish sentence was ever carried out but documents concerning the action have come to light and confirm the fact that Farinata did not die in exile.

[5] 19th. century Florentines, more grateful than their 13th. century forefathers, desired that one of the four niches of the Uffizi, facing the Arno, should contain a statue of the great citizen immortalised by Dante, on a line with those of three other Florentine heroes, Ferruccio, Pier Capponi and Giovanni delle Bande Nere.

Epigraph IV. – THE PONTE VECCHIO.

". . . . . IN SUL PASSO D'ARNO "

– DANTE – INF. 'XIII' 146 –

. . . . . " on the pass of Arno ".

Longfellow's translation.

On the portico of Ponte Vecchio, left-hand side, as one crosses the bridge from Por Santa Maria.

When Dante entered the second *girone* or round of the VII circle of the Inferno, he found a "dismal forest", populated by the spirits of those who had laid violent hands on themselves and who were punished by being changed into gnarled trees. The words of the Epigraph, spoken by an unknown Florentine suicide, refer to the Ponte Vecchio.

The "pass of Arno" was for centuries the only pass across the "proud river" which, fuller of water than it is today, ran freely "like a torrent which some lofty vein outpresses", in winding curves between wooded islands. But the hill of San Giorgio, thrusting out its large base as though to check its course, obliged the river to confine itself to a narrower channel and the ancient Italic inhabitants of the region, the industrious Etruscans from Fiesole and later, the Roman colonists, must all have converged on this point as being the safest and most suitable, first for a ferry and afterwards for a bridge [1].

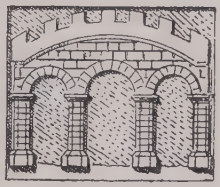
The strategic importance of this bridge, assuring as it did, a passage across the Arno and the continuity of the great line of communications between Rome and the valley of the Po [2], led the Romans, about 59, B. C. to choose this site for the foundation of a triumviral colony which was the origin of Roman Florence [See Epigraph XIV].

We know nothing of the appearance of this early bridge which, many centuries later, was still the only bridge of Christian Florence [3] enclosed within her first circuit of brick walls, which were replaced in 1178 by a wider circle of stone walls, for the greater security of the rapidly-developing commercial city.

The Ponte Vecchio is mentioned for the first time in history, in the year 1178, in connection with a terrible disaster. A flood carried away that only bridge which was " probably the ancient Roman bridge, of which the piers and arches had stood firm for twelve centuries ". A temporary wooden structure was thrown across the river until the erection of the new bridge, contemporary therefore with the second circuit, which is said to have been built of stone and brickwork, with three arches supported on four piers. We know what it must have loked like, for " the new city of Florence ", being divided into Sixths, of which five were on the north side of the Arno, the one Sixth on the south

side, the "Sestiere d'Oltrarno", took for its badge an reproduction of the new bridge.

The busy life of the city, and its trade and commerce, centred in the Ponte Vecchio and its immediate neighbourhood. All day long there was passing to and fro across the river and the fruit and vegetable market [4] was held on the bridge itself, in wooden booths later replaced by shops. The fish-market was held near by in a separate loggia ["*forum piscarium*"] [5] while butcher's meat was sold in Borgo S. Apostoli. Via Por S. Maria, the street leading to the bridge on the north side, was very much as we see it today. Access to it was through a gate called Porta Santa Maria from the name of a neighbouring church [S. Maria sopra Porta, now the secularised church of S. Biagio] and it was a very active centre of commerce, extending as far as Calimala. At the beginning of the 12th. century, many of the principal Florentine families had their houses in Via Por S. Maria which



Badge of the Sesto d'Oltrarno.

S. Maria sopra Porta.

subsequently became the site of the silk market, a flourishing industry, second only to that of wool, and a source of great wealth to the city. This is the "pass" recalled by Dante, dominated at one end by the massive tower of the Mannelli di Capo di Ponte [6] and guarded at the other by a mutilated statue, the *pietra scema*, supposed to be an ancient image of Mars, at the foot of which the sanguinary strife of political factions in Florence had its beginning [See Epigraph XXIX]. Hitherto known simply as "the bridge", it now began to be called the Ponte Vecchio or old bridge, to distinguish it from the new stone and brickwork bridge which in 1237 was built a little higher up the stream and named *a Rubaconte* [See Epigraph X] [7]. Ill-luck seemed to wait upon the earliest bridge for, after the wooden booths that lined it had been burned down several times either accidentally or by design, the Ponte Vecchio itself was swept away by the terrible inundation of 1333 [See Epigraph XI] and the Florentines waited twelve years before rebuilding it. [8]. We are unaware of the reasons for this unaccountable delay, but if we reflect that the Republic had to repair the heavy damage caused by the flood to the whole city and the *contado;* and that it was also helping the Venetians to make war on Mastino della Scala, Lord of Verona - a war which lasted from 1336 to 1342 and cost, says

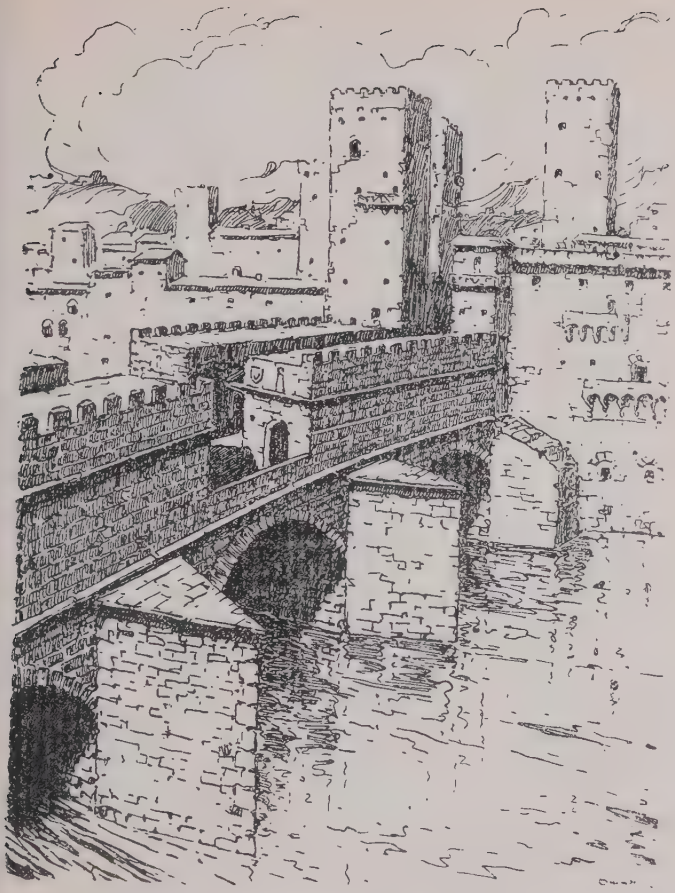
Villani, " more than 25,000 florins of gold each month which had to be sent to Venice, besides the necessary expenses incurred by our Commune at home " - we can fairly assume that lack of funds had something to do with it. The Ponte Vecchio was not the all-important structure that it had once been, for traffic between the two sides of the river was now carried on, not only across the Ponte a Rubaconte but also across Ponte alla Carraia and Ponte Santa Trinita, both of which had been in existence for some time [9].

However, when the Commune " was finally pleased " to decree the reconstruction of the Ponte Vecchio, it saw to it that the structure was such as to give every guarantee of safety for the future.

The work was entrusted to Taddeo Gaddi and this great Florentine architect, no unworthy successor to Giotto and Arnolfo, proved fully equal to the task. He erected a monument which besides being characteristically Tuscan, was of such solid structure that it has withstood the violence of the current for five centuries. Massive, short and narrow, curiously uniting the features of a street and a square, it is unique in the world and the object of universal admiration though the purity and grandeur of its original lines have been disfigured more than once by alterations.

We give a brief description of the Ponte Vecchio as it was in 1345 [10]. Four towers, two at either end, stood as vigilant guardians of the pass [11]; four porticoes with battlemented terraces branched out from the towers towards the centre of the bridge which was left open like a kind of little Piazza. Four doors still visible gave access to the terraced roofs which were furnished with seats. Below the terraces the porticoes were subdivided into 48 sections for shops of all kinds to which, in 1422, were even added "filthy butchers very ill suited to that place" [Manni].

This was the Ponte Vecchio of Republican Florence, which remained intact for two centuries and was then so pulled about by the Medici Grand Dukes as to lose much of its original character. Cosimo I started in 1564 by making Vasari build the long corridor joining his new private residence [12], Palazzo Pitti, to Palazzo della Signoria where the government offices still remained. To carry the corridor across the bridge Vasari utilized the two porticoes on the left, uniting them by a three-arched loggia. It was a difficult task but it must be admitted that Vasari managed to bring the lines of the new superstructure into harmony with the general character of the bridge, without doing much harm. Later, in 1593 the Grand Duke Ferdinand I who disliked having to cross a



The Ponte Vecchio in 1345.
(An ideal reconstruction from traces still visible).

bridge that was neither more nor less than a noisy market, [13] gave orders that all the shops where "low trades" were carried on, should be closed and their place taken by jewellers and goldsmiths [14].

The most ruthless disfigurement of the Ponte Vecchio took place, however, at the beginning of the 18th. century, during the inept reign of the sixth Grand Duke, Cosimo III. The shops, formerly belonging to the Commune, now passed into private hands and each owner thought himself entitled to transform his property according to individual taste. The jewellers started projecting doors with shutters, known as *madielle*, which encroached upon the pathway; at the same time they enlarged their back premises with balconies and dormer windows of every size and colour, jutting out over the river and supported on wooden beams or props. Worse still, the shops on the side opposite Vasari's corridor, were built over in a most fantastic and irregular manner, completely hiding the outlines of the original terraces.

"The arbitrary enlargement of the shops", says Carocci, "entirely altered the look of the bridge, and if the irregular outlines and polychrome colouring of those *hovels* ["catapecchie"] strike the eye with a certain sense of the picturesque, they are nevertheless a blot, grossly disfiguring

Vasari's loggia on the Ponte Vecchio (from an 18th. century print).

and obliterating the beautiful architecture of Gaddi and Vasari".

Even in days not distant from our own, some of the most typical shops of the Ponte Vecchio, consecrated by time, were demolished, with the consent of the Municipality [15] to make way for larger shops built in a modern style and decorated with marbles, stucco and gilding, wholly out of place and jarring with the rest of their surroundings. There was even a project of bringing the old bridge quite up to date, by closing it in with a glass roof!

We will end these brief historical notes by adding that as the Ponte Vecchio was built when the Guelph Party was in power, it was adorned with the arms of this faction [16] and with those of the Church [17] and the House of Anjou [18], always its strenuous supporters. The bas-relief of a tower which appears on several parts of the bridge, represents the arms of the "Capitani di Torre" or Captains of the Tower, who saw to its maintenance [19]. Two epigraphs, on one of which is carved a small idol of dubious meaning, record the flood of 1333 and the subsequent reconstruction of the bridge; [20] a marble gnomen testifies to the only means known in the middle ages of marking the daylight hours, before the invention of tower clocks [See Epigraph XIV].

The bust of Benvenuto Cellini which was placed

on the central piazzetta in 1900 by the goldmiths of Florence, is the work of the Tuscan sculptor, Raffaello Romanelli. It is a sympathetic re-evocation of the florid art of the great Florentine goldsmith of the 16th. century and is not out of place on the famous bridge.

NOTES.

[1] At a place known as "il Girone" six kilometres higher up the river, are the ruins of a bridge of solid masonry which probably mark another very ancient "pass" over the Arno, connecting a road between Arezzo and Fiesole.

[2] This was Via Cassia, built by Caius Cassius in the year of Rome 560 [194 B. C.] and restored by the Emperor Hadrian in 120 A. D. It passed through the centre of Tuscany and, crossing the bridge, ran through Florence from the south gate [afterwards Por S. Maria] to the north gate [afterwards the Cathedral or Bishop's gate].

[3] The early Christians used to cross it in sad procession, to accompany the bodies of their co-religionists to the churchyard of Santa Felicità.

[4] Vegetables and other foodstuffs.

[5] The loggia for the fish-market was on the right side of the bridge, on the site of the present Via degli Archibusieri, in the little square still known as Piazzetta del Pesce. It was demolished to make room for Vasari's corridor, and another fish-market was built shortly aftewards in Mercato Vecchio.

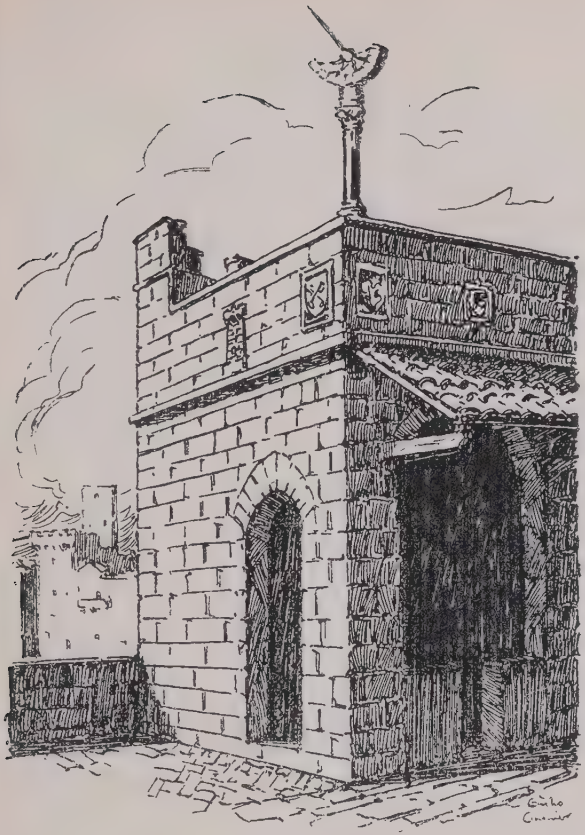
[6] This stately tower which dates from 1248, is situated at the corner of Via dei Bardi and the Ponte Vecchio.

[7] For the sake of clearness, it is as well to say that there were two bridges, both known as "Ponte Vecchio"; one was the bridge seen by Dante and destroyed in 1333; the other was the reconstruction of 1345 which is the one still existing, though somewhat changed from its original form.

The Ponte Vecchio which preceded the present one.
(From a 14th. century miniature).

[8] Two temporary wooden bridges were built, both of which were burned down in a popular rising, before the new bridge was finished.

[9] Ponte alla Carraia dates from 1218. It was destroyed more than once, either wholly or partially, by floods and it was rebuilt several times, first in wood with jutting-stones of masonry and aftewards in a more solid form. It was restored and widened as we see it today, in 1865. Ponte S. Trinità was built in 1269, and was also carried away more than once by the current. It had the good fortune to be rebuilt by Ammannati in 1559, in its present graceful and elegant form and it is universally



The Sun-dial of Ponte Vecchio.

considered one of the most beautiful bridges in the world. The statues of the four Seasons were added in 1608. Both these bridges originally had a small oratory on one side, like that of Ponte delle Grazie.

[10] The Ponte Vecchio was built entirely of *pietra concia*, that is, of squared stones with smooth edges fitting perfectly together. Florentine buildings are noted for this special characteristic of mediaeval architecture.
It is said that the reconstruction of the Ponte Vecchio cost the Commune the sum – enomous for those times – of 70,000 florins. To raise funds, collecting-boxes for offerings were placed in several of the city churches In Santa Croce, one of these boxes was placed on the first pillar to the right, beneath Bernardo Rossellini's beautiful bas-relief, the "Vergine del Latte".

[11] Of the four towers, the only one remaining is that of the Mannelli [see Note 6] which aften seven centuries, still belongs to the family that built it.

[12] Eleonora di Toledo, the first, wife of the Grand Duke Cosimo I, bought Palazzo Pitti 1550 at her own expense, from the nephews of Luca Pitti who erected the central part of the palace from designs by Brunelleschi. It was subsequently much enlarged and embellished. The Pitti family, once exceedingly rich and powerful, declined into indigence and obscurity. When Luca Pitti heard it rumoured in Florence that he was ruining himself to build his palace, he sent out invitations to dinner to a number of citizens, giving them each, instead of a chair, a sack of *zecchini* to sit on!

[13] Towards the middle of the 16th. century, the Ponte Vecchio shops included three butchers, three general provision shops, two flax-sellers, two corn-chandlers, five shoe-makers, a glass-seller, and other dealers of

The "chiesino" on Ponte alla Carraia, demolished in 1867.

various kinds. The central loggia was first occupied by greengrocers, afterwards by fruit-sellers, who were the last to be dislodged.

[14] Goldsmiths and metal-workers had their shops in the first part of Via dei Federighi, then called Via degli Orafi. They also had shops in Via del Moro, Via dei Servi and Mercato Nuovo.

[15] The first shop to be restored in modern style was that of a certain L. Ricci, who recorded the fact on a marble tablet over the entrance, adorned with an effigy of Benvenuto Cellini, in bas-relief. The inscription ran as follows: THE FIRST JEWELLER'S SHOP TO BE RESTORED IN 1857, ON A DESIGN IMPOSED (!) BY THE MUNICIPALITY – MAY THIS EFFIGY RECALL THE GLORIES OF ART AND STIR THE MINDS OF OTHERS TO GENEROUS EMULATION.

[16] An eagle holding a dragon in its claws.

[17] Two crossed keys.

[18] The lilies of the House of France.

[19] The Capitani di Torre were a mediaeval institution, not unlike our civil engineers. They vere called "of the Tower" because they had their residence in the Palazzo del Bargello.

[20] As an historical curiosity, we transcribe one of these inscriptions, composed of four endecasyllables so barbarously broken up as to make them seem a riddle:

NEL · TRENTATRE · DOPOL
MILLE · TRECENTO · IL PON
TE · CADDE · PER · DILUVIO · DACQUE
POI · DODICI · ANNI · COME · AL · COMUNE [sic.]
PIACQUE · RIFATTO · FU · CON ·
QUESTO · ADORNAMENTO.

Epigraph V. – BRUNETTO LATINI.

. . . . IN LA MENTE M'È FITTA, ED OR M'ACCORA,
LA CARA E BUONA IMAGINE PATERNA
DI VOI, QUANDO NEL MONDO AD ORA AD ORA

M' INSEGNAVATE COME L' UOM S' ETERNA:

– DANTE – INF. 'XV' 82–85 –

. . . . . " in my mind is fixed, and touches now
My heart the dear and good paternal image
of you, when in the world from hour to hour

You taught me how a man becomes eternal: "

Longfellow's translation.

In Via Cerretani, on the side-wall of the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, to recall the fact that Ser Brunetto Latini, a philosopher and learned scholar of the 13th. century, was buried in this church.

In the third round of the seventh circle of the Inferno where the violent against God, against nature and against art, are condemned to suffer under an eternal rain of fire, Dante recognises one spirit among a band " lamenting its eternal doom ", as that of Ser Brunetto Latini, who had been, if not his tutor in the strict sense of the word, at any rate a wise counsellor and guide to him in his youthful studies [1].

The touching, affectionate words of the Epigraph are admirably expressive of the filial gratitude felt by Dante for Brunetto as a master of erudition, though he though so poorly of him as a " man of the world " as to assign him, with rigid justice, a place in that sad round among the *herd* of

> " *men of letters great and of great fame,*
> *In the world tainted with the self-same sin* ".

In other words: . . . . In my mind is fixed [impressed] your dear and good paternal image

and it distresses me now [now that I find you among the damned, it distresses me to see you so changed by the fiery rain] to remember how in the world from hour to hour [from time to time] you taught me how by study and assiduous care of his own intellect, a man may acquire eternal fame.

NOTES.

[1] Ser Brunetto Latini, born in 1220 of a good Florentine family, and Secretary of the Commune – hence his title of *Ser* – took an active part in the political events of his day. He belonged to the Guelph Party and sat frequently in the Councils of the Magistracy of his native city.

While absent on an embassy to King Alfonso of Castile, to ask him to send troops to help the Florentines in their war against the Sienese and the Ghibelline exiles, the Guelphs were completely routed at the great battle of Montaperti and Brunetto Latini deemed it wiser to remain for a time in France. In 1266 when the power of the Ghibellines had been crushed by the death of King Manfred at the battle of Benevento, Brunetto returned to Florence where he died in 1294. He was buried in his parish church of Santa Maria Maggiore.

In the chapel on the left of the high altar, is a little column, said to have been part of Brunetto's monument, which was dispersed during a later restoration of the church, when the adjoining convent was first suppressed and then demolished.

Brunetto Latini's greatest work is the "Tesoro" or Treasure, written in French during his stay in France.

Ideal reconstruction of Santa Maria Maggiore
and its bell-tower.

It is an encyclopaedia of history, physics, geography. rhetoric, morality and politics; a summary, in short, of the scholastic doctrine with which, as Villani says, Brunetto "refined" the Florentines. Another of his works is the "Tesoretto", an allegorical-didactic poem written in Italian, which he never finished.

The baroque restorations effected during the 17th. century have not entirely obliterated the pointed style of the original church of Santa Maria Maggiore which some attribute to Arnolfo del Cambio, declaring it to be the embryo of Santa Maria del Fiore. Recent restorations have brought to light the remains of the old bell-tower, which was truncated in 1630, and of the façade with a portal, in the tympanum of which is a statue of the Pisan school, representing the Madonna and Child.

"Berta"
believed to be the cabbage-seller.

The sculptured head of a woman, high up on the north wall where the tower formerly stood, has always been popularly known as "la cavolaia" [the cabbage-seller] because it is supposed to be the portrait of a old woman who sold vegetables near the church and is the heroine of strange mediaeval legends which have found their way into stories and popular plays. It is more probably the portrait of a pious benefactress named Berta [the name is inscribed on a blackened stone below the bust] who provided the church with a bell [also engraved with the same name] to ring out the hour of curfew, a signal for law-abiding folk to re-enter the city ere the gates were closed. The bell which rang at half past nine, in the evening, was called the "bell of the cabbage-seller".

It was re-cast in 1610, the name "Berta" being retained While speaking of Santa Maria Maggiore, we must not omit to mention that this church contains the tomb of Salvino degli Armati, a 14th. century Florentine, once believed to have been the original inventor of spectacles, though now it is a recognised fact that spectacles were first made in Europe by Fra Alessandro della Spina, an ingenious and versatile monk who lived at Pisa between the close of the 13th. and the beginning of the 14th. century. Aided by reliable documents and scientific treatises, the historian, Isidoro Del Lungo, proved that the mistake "was fathered by Del Migliore and held at the font by Manni"; it was due, in other words, to Del Migliore's wish to credit his native city with an honour to which she had no claim. "This version was held as Gospel by public opinion and confirmed by a monument". The monument itself, removed from the cloister to a place in the church, facing the remnant of Brunetto Latini's tomb, is nothing but a spurious anachronism, a combination of ancient decorative motifs and inscriptions artfully put together, but obviously not harmonising either in style or chronology. "The whole", says Del Lungo, "to the honour and glory of a Florentine citizen and artisan who belonged to the Signoria and other Magistracies of his city in the 14th. century and to whom no one ever dreamt of attributing the invention of spectacles until the 17th. century.

Epigraph VI. – THE GIANFIGLIAZZI.

. . . . . COM' IO RIGUARDANDO TRA LOR VEGNO,
IN UNA BORSA GIALLA VIDI AZZURRO,
CHE D'UN LEONE AVEA FACCIA E CONTEGNO.

– DANTE – INF. ' XVII ' 58–60 –

And as I gazing round me come among them,
Upon a yellow pouch I azure saw
That had the face and posture of a lion.

Longfellow's translation.

On the façade of No. 1 Via Tornabuoni. The allusion is to the ancient Florentine family of Gianfigliazzi who had their houses here, extending from the palace with a tower next to the church of S. Trinita, down to the Arno and along the river front.

In this *terzina* Dante brands those who enriched themselves by usury. He shows such relentless severity towards this particular sin that one cannot help fancying he must have found himself, at some time in his life, in the clutches of extortionate money-lenders.

The usurers who occupy the third round of the VII circle, are condemned to sit on the ground, trying to free themselves with their hands from the rain of fire continually falling on them, and gazing at the same time on an empty wallet suspended round their neck. From the arms on the wallets, symbols of ill-famed pride, Dante recognises some noted usurers of his own time and among them the Gianfigliazzi. Florentine bankers [2] were generally also money-lenders and usury was one of their principal sources of gain [3]. Notwithstanding the doubtful origin of their wealth, the Gianfigliazzi must later, at any rate, have enjoyed general respect and esteem, as they were frequent-

ly called upon to take part in the government of the Republic. When Pope Leo X went to Bologna in 1515 to meet the King of France, Francis I, he stayed with the Gianfigliazzi in their villa at Marignolle on his return journey, before making his state entry into Florence, and a Gianfigliazzi was one of the Commissioners for the defence of Leghorn.

In other words: As I passed along looking at them, I saw on a yellow wallet or pouch, a blue emblem having the face and attitude of a lion, and I recognised the shield of the Gianfigliazzi [or, a lion rampant azure, armed and langued gules].

NOTES.

[1] Not S. Trinità; S. Trinita is the Florentine way of pronouncing the word in connection with this church.

[2] Among the Florentine families who, from humble origins, rose to great wealth and position and founded important banking-houses abroad, were the Bardi and the Peruzzi who furnished Edward III of England with funds for his wars against France. Although victorious, the English King was never able to repay the loan which amounted to 1,365,000 gold florins, and the two bankers, Bardi and Peruzzi, failed, dragging down in their ruin

many citizens and foreigners who had deposited money with them. It is a fact that England has never denied, but equally has never attempted to repay this debt which, with interest, would now amount to many miliards.

[3] Usury was punished in Florence by very severe laws and those who had made money by this means, were obliged to disgorge part of their ill-gotten wealth to help in the building of our beautiful churches.

The arms
of the House of Anjou.

Epigraph VII. – THE BAPTISTERY.

> ". . . . . NEL MIO BEL SAN GIOVANNI ".
>
> – DANTE – INF. 'XIX' 17 –

. . . . . " In my beautiful St. John ".

Longfellow's translation.

On a paving-stone next to the outer wall of the Baptistery on the north side, facing Via Martelli.

The whole soul of Dante speaks in these few words, evoked by the thought of his native city. As in a vision there rose before him the dear, familiar streets and the beautiful church, centre of civic activities, and the exile's heart leapt with pride and longing. The Baptistery, the most important monument then existing in Florence, came into the Poet's mind in the VIII circle of the Inferno where he saw the Simoniacs or traffickers in holy things, condemned to be buried alive, head downward and feet in the air, in narrow openings not unlike the small stone basins surrounding the central font where he and his ancestors had received baptism.
Dante's touching reference to San Giovanni gave additional fame to the ancient church "where, for the last thousand years and more, every Catholic Florentine has been baptised. Even were its columns shattered and its walls in ruins, it would never be forgotten, having been immortalized by the Poet's love and yearning for

the beautiful building that stood for him as the symbol and emblem of his distant home". [Davidsohn].

The Baptistery is the only Florentine church of Dante's day that has come down to us in its original form [1]. The austerity of its lines, the sobriety of its decorations, all speak suggestively of its epoch and bring us very near to Dante who as an infant, uttered his first cries beneath its dome glittering with mosaics; as a boy trod the superb marble intarsias of its pavement; [2] and as a man broke one of the basins of the font, in a generous impulse to save "one who was drowning in it" [3].

Today, more than ever, this historic Baptistery appeals not only to Florentines but to all Italians who, if they venerate the tomb at Ravenna where the remains of the Poet are enshrined [4] yet feel themselves perhaps nearer to his spirit in the religious quiet of his "beautiful St. Iohn". For six centuries has that spirit waited for the long desired union of Italy and for the frontier reaching to the Quarnaro "That shuts in Italy and bathes its borders". [Inferno IX, 113].

The history of the Baptistery which is first mentioned in chronicles of the 14th. century and dwelt on with fuller detail and authority by later writers, comes down to us obscured by large inaccuracy of facts, doubtful archaeology and a mass of legends out of which it is very

difficult to form a clear opinion as to its origin and subsequent vicissitudes. "Errors" says the historian Manni (and he knew something about them - see Epigraph V) "are like hidden streams which, strengthened as they flow by the addition of many waters, soon become torrents irksome to cross or to overcome". But today, in speaking of our greatest monuments, intimately connected with our past history, civil, artistic and religious, it is no longer permissable to perpetuate false statements and ridiculous blunders which recent researches have inexorably condemned. The Florentine Baptistery is a case in point.

The well-known lines of the Inferno [Canto XIII]

> *"the city.... which to the Baptist*
> *Changed its first patron".*

have been wrongfully interpreted as confirming the tradition that the Baptistery was originally a pagan temple dedicated to the god Mars and adapted to Christian worship in the early days of our era. This legend had its root perhaps in the fact - confirmed during recent excavations effected in 1912 and 1915 - that the Baptistery was built over a great part of the area formerly occupied by the *praetorium* or some similar public edifice of the Roman period, situated for military reasons, near the crossing of the *decumanus maximus* with the *cardo* [5].

A more plausible but equally erroneous conjecture gave rise to the belief that the Baptistery, though really a Christian structure, was built up with architectural fragments from pagan temples. Those who maintained that it was purely Roman work were opposed by those who assigned to it a Lombard origin, and amid so many conflicting opinions, it was for a long time very difficult to settle the exact date of its foundation. Antiquarians also disagreed as to the restorations and additions afterwards made at different times to this wonderful building. It was said, for istance, that the octagonal temple had originally one door only, on the west side [opposite the Archbishop's palace] and that this door completed by an atrium, was closed to build the tribune for the high-altar which - so it was said - had previously stood on the opposite side of the building. This would imply that the present three doors are merely the casual result of this modification, Nothing can be more erroneous.

According to some authorities, the internal decorations date from 1202 and for a long time it was believed that the polichrome marble facing of the outer walls was executed in 1293 by Arnolfo di Cambio, the architect of the Florentine Republic [6]. Uncertainty also prevailed about the date when the cupola was

closed in. It would seem to have been originally open, in the style of Pagan temples.

The nature of this work does not permit us to linger over these historical discussions from which it is very difficult to get at the truth. Old chronicles, histories, treatises and monographs on art, the *incunabula* of modern guides, are unfortunately, full of errors where the Florentine Baptistery is concerned. Their information is constantly at variance with historic truth and such as to create confusion and prevent any exact knowledge of the evolution of Italian art.

Modern criticism, based on a spirit of analysis and a deeper intuition of history and archaeology, has, however, now been able to disprove legends, to correct errors and to re-write the story of our famous church, showing how its characteristics are those of primitive, original Christian art, inspired by pure and simple ideals of faith and beauty. We can now state positively, what Florentines should never forget, that the columns, ambulatories and three doors of the Baptistery, the great arch of the tribune and the decorations, all form part of the original structure which was built and decorated at the same time [7]. And if the severity of the "beautiful St. John" is mitigated by evident traces of the classical art of ancient Rome,

revealing itself in the exquisite grace of the columns and stilobate pilasters, in the rich composite capitals, and in the friezes and decorations of the outer walls and windows, hitherto looked upon as later additions, that depends entirely upon the fact that the unknown architect, living in days not far distant from paganism, created a new and wholly Florentine style, in harmony with the new religious beliefs, but could not free himself entirely from the precepts of ancient art in which he had been educated and of which he saw all round him wonderful survivals.

Today no one dares to speak of an ex-temple of Mars; everyone is agreed that the Baptistery dates from the end of the 4 th. or the beginning of the 5 th. century and that it was a Christian church from its very foundation. It was the first cathedral of Florence, known as the "Duomo di San Salvatore" [8]; and kept this name until the beginning of the 7 th century when the Lombards who succeeded the Romans as rulers of Tuscany, decided, like good Christian converts, that the cathedral of Florence should be called the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist who was held by them in special veneration.

We know for a fact that the building continued to be used as the cathedral until about 1050 when it yielded place to the cathedral of Santa

Reparata [9] and became definitely and for all time the Baptistery of the Florentine population [10].

The church was originally built on a high basement with steps which made the inner pavement higher than the street level. In process of time, as the level of the square was raised, the steps disappeared, spoiling the outer proportions of the building. In 1288 when the whole piazza was levelled, Arnolfo di Cambio was entrusted with the task of restoring all the lower part of the walls and it was on this occasion that the Commune ordered the removal of the numerous sarcophagi ranged along the outside of the Baptistery where they served as tombs for members of distinguished Florentine families [12].

The original sandstone structure was cased both inside and outside with polichrome marble slabs, only the eight corner pilasters being left free- "But in the said year [1293]" says Villani, "the pilasters round San Giovanni, formerly of stone, were faced with slabs of black and white marble, by order of the Arte di Calimala" [Guild of Foreign wool].

We have no accurate information about the baptismal font recalled by Dante, which probably dated from 1050. It was still in existence in Vasari's day [1512-1574] and he describes it briefly in a letter to a friend: "In the middle

of this church is the large marble font .... between this font and the high altar is the priests' choir, somewhat raised, and near the choir are the said tribune and the altar ".

The cupola has the peculiar feature of being double but it is uncertain if it was ever open at the top. In any case, we can state positively that when San Giovanni ceased to be the Cathedral and became the Baptistery, the cupola was closed in by a lantern surmounted by a gilt cross and ball. It was probably on this occasion that the original semi-circular tribune was replaced by the present one of rectangular shape, enriched with mosaic work, like the rest of the interior, in 1225.

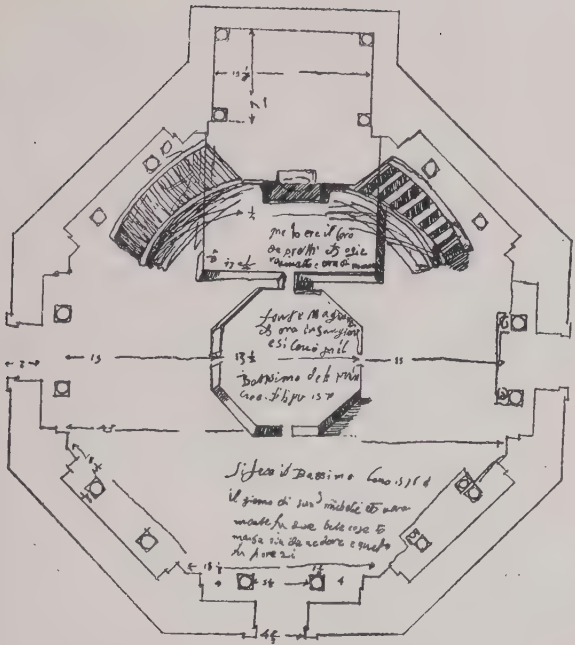
Such was the Baptistery as Dante knew it and the pride of the Florentines then as now. Our remote ancestors held it in particular veneration and always chose it as the scene of all the most solemn civil and religious ceremonies connected with the city [13]. They endowed it with relics of saints [14], with precious hangings, with war trophies [15] and with wonderful works of art of which the fame soon spread and is still alive in the world.

In 1313, Andrea da Pontedera, one of the first sculptors in Italy, executed a marble tabernacle for the high altar [16], a small hexagonal baptismal font [17] and - in 1336 - an beautiful bronze door [18]. Donatello as though anxious

that some work of his should have place in the Baptistery of his native city, carved a Magdalen in wood with almost painful realism and erected, with his pupil Michelozzo, the fine sepulchral monument to Pope John XXIII.

The most eminent artists of the Florentine Renaissance vied with one another in the decorations of the rich silver frontal for the high altar [19] and created a superb specimen of the goldsmith's art. Lorenzo Ghiberti modelled and cast two bronze doors of which the central one - facing the Cathedral - was acclaimed by Michelangelo as " the gate of Paradise ", a verdict confirmed by posterity. In the 16th. century Sansovino and Danti adorned the exterior of the Baptistery with fine groups of sculpture [20]. Later, in an epoch of civil decadence and corrupt taste, the Baptistery suffered from injurious alterations and restorations carried out without any respect for ancient memories or traditions. Thus the baptismal font, sacred from an historical as well as a religious point of view, was barbarously destroyed in 1577 when the Baptistery was prepared for the solemn baptism of Prince Philip, son of the Grand Duke Francis I and Joanna of Austria, who, after all, only lived five days. The court architect, Buontalenti, by order of the Grand Duke, levelled the font and the choir in front of the altar, " and so ", writes an anonymous diarist of the period, " these

holy marbles and sacred fragments were removed outside the city walls, without any reverence for the many sacred unctions and the incense by which they were hallowed, but there were many persons who went and picked up pieces from devotion and keep them as holy things" [21]. That was not all. In the 18 th. century, that age of aesthetic depravity, the Baptistery suffered a further outrage. The ancient altar and the tabernacle of Andrea da Pontedera were demolished to make way for a monumental Triumph of St. John, surrounded by marble angels seated on marble clouds. This baroque construction was only removed a few years ago when the interior of the Baptistery was finally restored to something of its original austere simplicity [22]. All sincere admirers of the work of our great artists of the past, rejoiced to see the interior of the " beautiful St. John " restored on historical lines [23] and the high altar brought back to its original shape and dimensions [23]. The presence of this relic which had miraculously escaped intact from the mania for innovations inherent in certain periods, compensates us to some extent for the irremediable loss of Dante's font which formed part of the original scheme.



Facsimile of a drawing by the Medici court-architect, Bernardo Buontalenti, (1536–1608) which reproduces approximately the ground-plan of the Baptistery prior to the demolition of the baptismal font.

NOTES.

[1] At that time there were about sixty churches in Florence, of which the greater number no longer exist while those that have survived retain their ancient name but not their original structure.

[2] The pavement consists of slabs of white marble inlaid with fragments of black marble or serpentine. The magnificent quadrant representing the zodiac must originally have been in the centre of the church; it was moved perhaps, to make room for the font. It is encircled by a Latin inscription in which the unknown mosaicists express their conviction of having accomplished a fine piece of work. The writing of which the penultimate line alone is illegible, runs as follows:

Hunc veniant quicumque volunt miranda videre
Et videant quæ visa valent pro iure placere
Florida cunctorum Florentia prompta bonorum
Hoc opus impletum petiit per signa polorum
. . . . . *C* . . . . . *ist* . . . . . .
Ima pavimenti perhibent insignia templi.

That is: Let all come here who would see wonderful things – And they will see such things as are justly capable of giving pleasure – Florence prosperous and furnished with all good things – Desired that this work should contain the constellations of the heavens – . . . . C . . . . ist . . . . – The high things of heaven encircle the lowest part of the pavement.
In the centre of the zodiac traces can still be seen of the gnomen made or restored by Strozzo Strozzi who died in 1012. "And we find, from ancient records, that the figure of the sun carved in mosaic, which says: *En giro torte sol ciclos et rotor igne,* was done by astro-

A fourth part of the zodiac and gnomen on the pavement of the Baptistery.

nomy and when the sun enters into the sign of Cancer, at mid-day, it shines on that place through the opening above where is the turret, and at no other time of the year". [Villani].
The Latin motto can be read equally from the left or from the right.

[3] As Dante himself recalls, ending his allusion to the incident with the indignant line: "Be this a seal all men to undeceive". Ancient commentators explain this passage by narrating that a small child having fallen into one of the basins surrounding the central font, Dante, to help it out, broke the marble parapet with an axe, for which he was blamed by some who thought, perhaps, that the hasty act was but ill-suited to the sanctity of the place. We would point out that although the incident is not of capital importance, yet the Poet dedicates a whole *terzina* to it while he only makes a slight reference to having taken part in the Battle of Campaldino and is altogether silent on the subject of his Priorate which was – as he himself affirms – the cause of all his misfortunes.

[4] Dante died at Ravenna in 1321, while the guest of his great friend and admirer, Guido da Polenta, Lord of Ravenna, who gave him a grand funeral and desired that he should have honourable burial. The body of the Poet was laid in a stone sarcophagus and deposited in the Convent of the Friars Minor, in a shrine built for the purpose. But when Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici became Pope Leo X, the Friars, jealous of their sacred charge and fearful lest Dante's remains, often reclaimed by the Florentines, should finally be transported to his native city through the influence of the powerful Pontiff, removed them secretly from the stone coffin and hid them in another part of the convent. In 1677 when all

fear had passed away, the Friars replaced the coffin containing the Poet's bones in one of the convent walls, but left no indication of the exact spot.
In the following century the convent was suppressed and all traces of the coffin were lost. In 1780 before proceeding to the restoration of the original shrine built to hold Dante's tomb, the stone sarcophagus was opened with great solemnity and found to be empty! An official report of the circumstance was drawn up, but couched in rather vague terms in hopes of concealing the sad truth from the world at large. As time went on it became however, a matter of general belief that Dante's bones were really lost. It was by pure accident that the precious remains were discovered in 1865 when the convent building was being restored. Their identity being established beyond all doubt after very careful scrutiny and examination, the skeleton was recomposed and replaced in the original stone urn.

[5] The excavations carried out beneath the pavement of the Baptistery can be easily visited as a brick passage devised by the architect Castellucci, gives access to the subsoil.

[6] For a long time this great mediaeval architect was believed to be of German origin but it is now ascertained that he was Italian, a native of Colle Val d'Elsa and the son of Cambio and Monna Perfetta.

[7] This has been proved with mathematical exactness by Nardini Mospignotti in his book "Il Duomo di San Giovanni", on which we have largely drawn for this brief description of the Baptistery. Many distinguished architects and art critics are of opinion that this work deserves to be better known, as it is based on facts and on logical and learned arguments.

[8] This change probably coincides with the construction of the little church of S. Salvatore al Vescovo, now incorporated in the Archbishop's Palace, only the façade being still visible in Piazza dell'Olio. During the modern restoration of the Palace, considerable remains were found of the original residence of the bishops of Florence. These are now preserved in the large courtyard of S. Marco together with other records of the ancient centre of the city.

[9] This church dedicated to the Syriac virgin who suffered martyrdom at Caesarea in the 3rd. century, was built about 679 and was about half the size of the present cathedral. It was probably the parish church used for baptisms, in connection with the Cathedral of S. Giovanni, but as time went on, the parts became inverted: S. Giovanni became the Baptistery and Santa Reparata the Cathedral.
Santa Reparata was demolished in 1294 to make room for the present Cathedral. It would seem that the Florentines continued for a long time to call the new building by the old name, for a deliberation of the Priors on April 29th., 1402, definitely abolished and even forbade any further use of the name of Santa Reparata, which was to be replaced by the more poetic title of Santa Maria del Fiore.

[10] In old days baptisms only took place once a year, on the morning of Holy Saturday. " The priests stood inside the font with bare feet and baptised first the males and then the females with a triple immersion. To cope with the crowds which were always increasing, it became necessary in Dante's day to build extra marble basins at the corners of the central font in which the priests stood protected from the rush and from which they dipped the infants in the water as they were handed

DANTIS OSSA
ame Fre Antonio Santi
hic posita
Anno 1677 die 12 Octobris

Facsimile of the epigraph inscribed on the wooden coffin containing Dante's bones, which was hidden by the Friars Minor of Ravenna.

to them by their godfathers" [Davidsohn]. Later, baptisms also took place on the day preceding Whit-Sunday and the small font was used when needed.

[11] The uneven level of the Piazza which had been widened by the demolition of some surrounding houses, was such that Via degli Adimari [now Via Calzaioli] was at the bottom of a sharp slope. Arnolfo levelled the ground and covered the square with a brick pavement.

Column of S. Zanobi.

[12] Some of these sarcophagi were placed outside the Compagnia dei Laudesi di S. Zanobi which stood close to Giotto's Campanile. The premises of the Company having been demolished together with other buildings in order to enlarge the Piazza on the side now called "dei Canonici", three of the finest sarcophagi were placed provisionally in the courtyard of the old Medici palace, wrongly called Palazzo Riccardi, whence they were only taken a year or two ago to their old place outside S. Giovanni. The column known as the "column of S. Zanobi" which stands near the Baptistery on the north side, is a record of the legend that in 1050 when the body of S. Zanobi was being translated from Santa Reparata to the church of S. Lorenzo, the bier accidentally touched a withered elm standing close to S. Giovanni and although it was the heart of winter [January 26th.] the tree immediately put forth leaves and flowers. "The people following the bier, full of wonder and devotion at the miracle, began to strip the branches from the trunk, everyone being

desirous of carrying home a token of the prodigy. Therefore so that the memory of it should not be lost, a marble column surmounted by a cross was raised in the centre of the Piazza ". The column was swept away by the inundation of 1333 but soon replaced and in 1384 it was decorated with a tiny tree in beaten iron-work, referring to the miracle.

[13] " And there were celebrated all the marriages and peacemakings and every festival and solemnity of the Commune " [Villani]. Yet after having turned the Guelphs out of Florence in February, 1248, the Ghibellines, enflamed by party passions, set to work to destroy everything that the Guelphs had made and even turned their blind rage against the Baptistery, solely because the rival Party had held their meetings there. They tried to destroy it by causing a neighbouring tower, 290 feet high [known as the " Guardamorto " because it was used as a mortuary chapel] to fall upon the Baptistery. The Guardamorto stood where the Loggia del Bigallo stands now and the shameful order to loosen its foundations and direct it upon S. Giovanni was given to the celebrated architect and sculptor, Niccolò Pisano. Fortunately the result was not what had been intended, as the tower though it duly fell, did so in the opposite direction and this was looked upon as a miracle.

[14] Among the precious relics formerly preserved in the Baptistery was the arm of St. Philip the Apostle, translated to Florence from Jerusalem in 1204. It now forms part of the Cathedral reliquary.

[15] Among the war trophies preserved in S. Giovanni were the chains of the Port of Pisa, taken from the defeated Pisans by the Florentines in 1362. They were restored to Pisa in 1859 on the occasion of the marriage

of Ubaldino Peruzzi [the distinguished Florentine patriot and statesman] with Emilia Toscanelli, the descendant of an old Pisan family.
The sword and helmet of the Bishop of Arezzo who was killed at the battle of Campaldino [1289], charging at the head of his Ghibellines, were preserved in S. Giovanni until 1670 when they they were removed by the Grand Duke Cosimo III on the ground that their public exhibition was a slur on sacerdotal dignity.
The two porphyry columns standing one on either side of the east gate, are also war records. They were presented by the Pisans as a token of gratitude for the protection against possible surprises from Lucca, afforded to their city by Florence in 1114 during the absence of the Pisan forces, engaged in the conquest of the Balearic Islands. There was a traditional belief that these two columns had the power of conferring second sight upon anyone who stood behind them, so the Pisans thinking to remove this prerogative, darkened them with smoke and covered them with rich silks before sending them to Florence, thus giving rise, perhaps, to the old proverb: " The Florentines are blind and the Pisans traitors ". So far as the former are concerned, this reputation would seem to be confirmed by Dante [Inferno, Canto XV]:

" *Old rumour in the world proclaims them blind* ".

[16] Andrea da Pontedera " made the tabernacle for the high altar of S. Giovanni, with two angels, one on either side ". Nothing remains of this work but one of the angels which now stands on one side of the high altar, and bears the following inscription: *MCCCXX Johannes Jacobi de Florentia Me Fecit.*

[17] This is the small font now used daily for baptisms. During the recent restoration of the church, it was put back into its original place.

[18] This is the gate on the south or Bigallo side. In 1336 it formed the east or central entrance facing the Cathedral but was removed in 1452 to make room for Ghiberti's second gate. The original doors of the Baptistery were all of poor material and workmanship.

Fragment of the mosaic pavement of the Baptistery.

[19] Contemporary chroniclers tell us that it took III years to complete this marvellous piece of work in the making of which 325 pounds of silver were employed. It is now in the Museum of the Opera del Duomo.

[20] The Commune of Florence was in the habit of placing the erection of its most important buildings under the direct supervision of one of the greater Guilds. Thus the Guild of Wool saw to the building of the Cathedral of S Maria del Fiore and the Goldsmiths' Guild to that of Or S. Michele; the Arte di Calimala or Guild of Traders in Foreign Wool, obtained charge of the church of S. Miniato al Monte in 1226 and in the 15th. century they became also patrons of the Baptistery.

[21] The marble fragments preserved in the Museum of the Opera del Duomo which were formerly believed to be the remains of the ancient font, are now considered to have formed part of the adjoining choir.

[22] Preserved in the courtyard of the above Museum.

[23] Fragments of this altar were discovered in various parts of the Baptistery where they had been used as building material. The manuscript diary of the learned priest, Anton Francesco Gori, Rector of the Baptistery, who was witness of the sacrilegious demolition, fortunately contains an accurate sketch of the altar "which I drew as best I could "says Gori" before it was removed and destroyed in 1731". Thanks to this precious document, now in the Marucelliana Library, it was possible to put the altar together again in its original shape and dimensions, but without Andrea's tabernacle of which no trace remained.

Arms of the Guelph Party
(see Epigraph IV).

Epigraph VIII. – DANTE'S HOUSES.

. . . . . IO FUI NATO E CRESCIUTO
SOVRA 'L BEL FIUME D'ARNO, ALLA GRAN VILLA

– DANTE – INF. 'XXIII' 94–95 –

(. . . . . " Born was I and grew up
In the great town on the fair River of Arno ").

Longfellow's translation.

On the wall of a house in Via Dante Alighieri opposite the Torre della Castagna (1), where it is believed that Dante was born (2).

Briefly declaring himself to be a Florentine but without revealing his identity, Dante answers the two "Frati Gaudenti" [3] whom he meets among the hypocrites in the sixth round of Circle VIII, condemned to walk slowly for ever in heavy hooded mantles of gilded lead, symbols of plausible appearance.

This is one of the few occasions when the Poet, forgetful for a moment of his bitter grievances, refers to his native place in words expressing either praise, admiration or regret.

In Florence "born was I and grew up" says the exile, unjustly sentenced, his heart stabbed, perhaps, by a secret presentiment that never again, with his mortal eyes, would he see the walls of his ancestral home (4). And yielding to the sweetness of recalling early days, ever present with him, he speaks of the Arno as "the fair river" flowing through the midst of Tuscany between wooded slopes and smiling plains, and calls Florence "the great town"

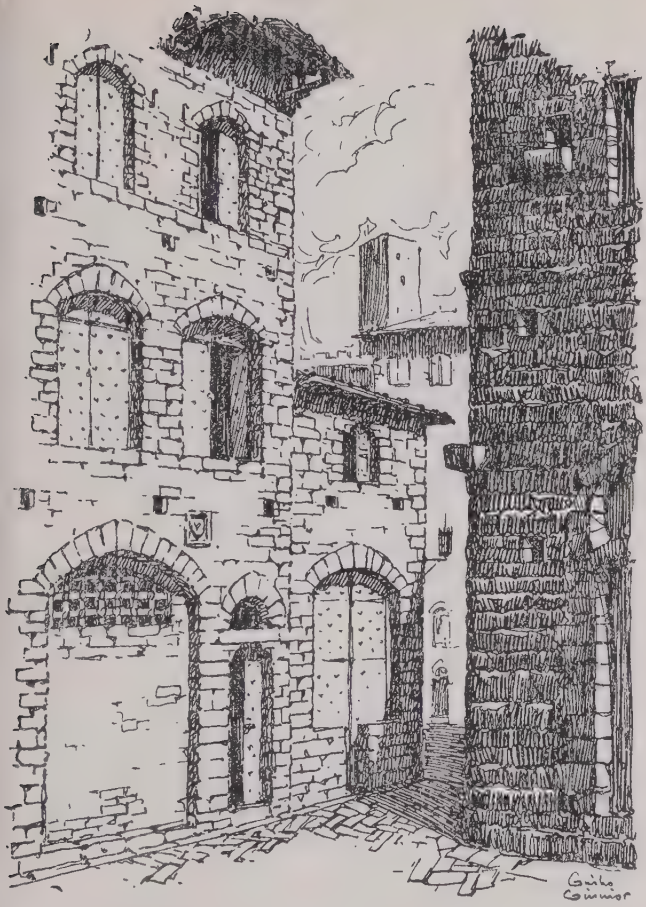
which he knows, though only by hearsay, to be now adorned with the Cathedral of S. Maria del Fiore and a beautiful Campanile, with the church of Santa Croce and the Palace of the Signory, crowned by a lofty battlemented tower, prodigies, all these, of purely Tuscan art which had risen, as if by enchantment, within the course of a few years, beneath the blue Florentine sky [5].

NOTES.

[1] This tower originally belonged to the Benedictine monks of the Florentine Badia [See Epigraph XXIV] and in Dante's early days it was the residence of the Priors. On its restoration a few years ago it was marked by two inscriptions, one facing Via Dante Alighieri and the other Piazza S. Martino. The first of these inscriptions runs as follows:

QUESTA TORRE
DETTA DELLA CASTAGNA
UNICA RESTA
DELLE SEDI ONDE I PRIORI DELLE ARTI
RESSERO FIRENZE
PRIMA CHE LA FORZA E LA GLORIA
DEL FIORENTINO COMUNE
FACESSERO SORGERE
IL PALAZZO DELLA SIGNORIA

[This tower – called Della Castagna – is the only one left – of the residences whence the Priors of the Arts – ruled Florence – ere the strength and glory – of the Florentine Commune – reared the Palace of the Signory].



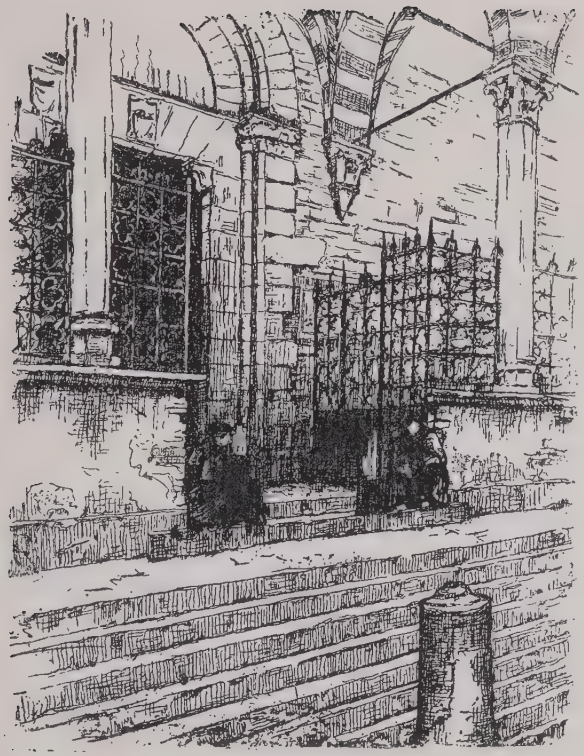
The house where it was believed that Dante was born.

The second inscription, taken from Dino Compagni's "Cronaca", says: *E chiamaronsi Priori dell'Arti e stettero rinchiusi nella torre della Castagna appresso alla Badia acciò non temessero le minaccie de' potenti.* ["They were called the Priors of the Arts and they were shut up in the Castagna tower near the Badia so that they should not fear the threats of the powerful"].

San Martino del Vescovo
Dante's parish church.

The piazza di San Martino takes its name from the old church of San Martino del Vescovo which was Dante's parish church just as the neighbouring church of Santa Margherita was that of Beatrice. It dates from 986 when its façade faced the square now called "dei Cimatori" and formerly "di San Martino", the latter name being afterwards given to the little square behind and to the street running past it, now Via Dante Alighieri. Of the ancient church, suppressed in 1479, there only remains the Oratory of the "Buonomini di San Martino", a benevolent society founded in 1441 by the Archbishop of Florence, St. Antonino. This institution which has carried on its charitable work *silently* for five hundred years among the really needy families of the city who are ashamed to beg, is governed by the following rules: *Ask from the rich to help the poor; never reveal the names of those who are benefited; do not accumulate capital.*

The Oratory which contains some good frescoes by Renaissance artists, has lately been thoroughly and very carefully restored.



Side entrance to Santa Croce.

[2] The reader may think it strange that we should speak of Dante's houses after the sentence inflicted on the Poet which included the confiscation and destruction of his property. But 21 years after his death, the Republic in a first act of clemency [Jan. 9th. 1342 O. S.] granted the sons of "the enemy of the Guelph Party, guilty of baratry in his office as Prior" as Dante was shamefully described in the notarial act, the privilege of recuperating their father's property with such houses "burned and not burned" as might still be standing.

[3] A knightly order of Friars of Santa Maria Gloriosa, founded by the Beato Brangazio, one of the successors of St. Dominic. Their habit was white with a grey mantle; their duties were to defend widows and orphans and reconcile hostile parties. They were not bound by vows of chastity or poverty and they were ironically called *Frati Gaudenti* or the Joyous Friars because they soon forgot their duties and gave themselves over to pleasure. The order was suppressed by Pope Sixtus V in 1585.
In 1266 two Frati Gaudenti were summoned from Bologna to act jointly as Podestà of Florence, to bring back peace into the city and to govern it honestly and justly. For the purpose of discussing public affairs with representatives of the powerful Guilds, the Frati Gaudenti used to attend meetings held in the residences of the Consuls of the Calimala [Clothdressers'] Guild in Mercato Nuovo, where the shop of Molteni the chemist now stands. An inscription on this house facing Via Porta Rossa, recalls the fact that they made many good laws for the public benefit *[molte buone leggi in utile pubblico statuirono]*, and here, says the Florentine historian, Gino Capponi, "uscì ad un tratto e come di per sè la Repubblica di Firenze" ["the Florentine Republic was suddenly and spontaneously born"]. That the Bolognese

Friars were not considered to have carried out their mission successfully we learn from a contemporary chronicler who says that "under the guise of false hypocrisy they seemed to be in agreement to act more for their own advantage than for the good of the city". This explains their place among the hypocrites.

[4] Although the Aretine writer of the 15th. century, Leonardo Bruni, wrote in his life of Dante, that the family of Messer Cacciaguida called Alighieri had their houses in the piazza behind San Martino del Vescovo, facing the street leading to the Sacchetti houses [now Via dei Magazzini] and extending on the other side towards the Donati and Giuochi houses, yet it was by no means easy to find the exact location of these buildings. After the Poet's death, they were divided among his sons and then passed into the hands of different religious bodies and private individuals who altered them very considerably both in appearance and ground-plan. The question was carefully studied between 1865 and 1869 and after much patient research, it was possible to establish, on documentary evidence, that the block of houses and towers in Via Santa Margherita and the other block in Piazza San Martino originally formed a whole, at the time when the Poet was born. Notwithstanding this discovery, the sixth centenary of Dante's birth – and the first one celebrated by the Kingdom of Italy, – was allowed to pass without anything being done to restore these historic walls which were in a pitiable state of decay. It was only ten years later when Florence was crowded by foreigners and visitors from all parts of Italy, for the celebration of the 4th. Centenary of Michelangelo Buonarroti, that the Municipality decided for very shame to restore the façade of the house situated on Piazza San Martino then believed to be Dante's home, though it was really only one among the Alighieri houses. The res-

toration was duly carried out, leaving however, the old inscription which for years had asserted with impunity: "IN QUESTA CASA DEGLI ALIGHIERI NACQUE IL DIVINO POETA" [In this house of the Alighieri was born the Divine Poet]. It was a mistake to have retained this inscription as the exhaustive studies recently made in connection with these houses had proved that the statement was purely arbitrary and in no way corresponding to the truth. But in 1900 when the sixth centenary of Dante's Priorate was solemnly commemorated, the Commune finally took the matter definitely in hand. They obtained possession of the site and on the ruins of the old Alighieri houses [recognized as Dante's birthplace] they built up a new building "in public honour of the Divine Poet". The inscription recording this restoration was placed in 1911.

[5] If Florence was becoming the admiration of the world with Santa Maria del Fiore, begun in 1294 and the great Franciscan church of Santa Croce dating from 1295, it should not be forgotten that she already possessed one of the most beautiful buildings in Italy in the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella built in 1278. And if we turn to civic buildings, the Palazzo Vecchio was preceded in 1255 by the magnificent Palazzo del Podestà which has come down to us almost intact, in its severe, mediaeval beauty [see Epigraph XXIV].

Epigraph IX. – BOCCA DEGLI ABATI.

QUANDO UN ALTRO GRIDÒ: 'CHE HAI TU, BOCCA?
NON TI BASTA SONAR CON LE MASCELLE,
SE TU NON LATRI? QUAL DIAVOL TI TOCCA?'

– DANTE – INF. 'XXXII' 106–108 –

When cried another: "What doth ail thee, Bocca?
Is't not enough to clatter with thy jaws,
But thou must bark? What devil touches thee?"

Longfellow's translation.

Bocca degli Abati who belonged to one of the most noble and ancient Ghibelline families, is the "accursed traitor" of Montaperti. Dante condemns him to eternal malediction by placing him in the *Antenora* or second zone of the lowest circle of the Inferno, among traitors to their country, condemned to be immersed for ever in a lake of frozen ice, only their heads remaining above the surface. This is symbolical of the coldness and hardness of their hearts.

It must be remembered that if at Montaperti the Sienese and the banished Ghibellines gained a victory over the Guelphs [see Epigraph III], it was not so much by force of arms as by vile treachery. While fighting was going on strenuously on both sides and neither army had yet gained a decided advantage, the Florentine Ghibellines [whom the Guelphs had imprudently forced to follow them and take part in the battle], took to flight at a signal from Abati and

went over to the enemy. At the same moment Bocca degli Abati severed at one blow the hand of Jacopo de' Pazzi, the standard-bearer of the Florentine cavalry. As the flag fell to the ground, a panic ensued in the ranks ending in a general rout. It was a shameful piece of treachery which cannot be sufficiently execrated [see Epigraph III].

As Dante walked along the ice between the heads of the traitors, "whether it were will or destiny or chance, I know not", he says, "but I struck my foot hard in the face of one" who cried out in pain "Why dost thou trample me? Unless thou comest to increase the vengeance of Montaperti?" At these words, Dante understood with whom he had to do, but to make certain of his name he seized him indignantly "by the scalp behind". But as Bocca from shame and anger still refused to give his name, another traitor near him called it out, apostrophising him in the words of the Epigraph.

In other words: When another one called out: What doth ail thee, Bocca? Is't not enough to clatter with thy jaws [his teeth were chattering from the cold] But thou must also bark like a dog? What devil touches thee? [that is, what fresh grievance have you got now?]

Epigraph X. – S. MINIATO AL MONTE.

. . . . . "PER SALIRE AL MONTE
DOVE SIEDE LA CHIESA CHE SOGGIOGA
LA BEN GUIDATA SOPRA RUBACONTE,

SI ROMPE DEL MONTAR L'ARDITA FOGA
PER LE SCALEE CHE SI FERO AD ETADE
CH' ERA SICURO 'L QUADERNO E LA DOGA.

– DANTE – PURG. 'XII' 100–105 –

. . . . . "To ascend the mount,
Where seated is the church that lordeth it
O'er the well-guided above Rubaconte,

The bold abruptness of the ascent is broken
By stairways that were made there in the age
When still were safe the ledger and the stave"].

Longfellow's translation.

Placed at the beginning of the flight of steps, parallel with Via del Monte alle Croci [1], leading to S. Salvadore al Monte.

The meaning of these two *terzine* is not very clear, because the last lines refer to incidents which occurred in Florence in Dante's time, but are only explained by the earliest commentators of the Poem. The passage forms, however, an extraordinarily apt similitude, giving a vivid idea of the steep climb that the Poet and his Guide had to overcome in order to reach the second Circle of the Purgatorio. Dante imagines this opening to have been cut in the rock and so narrow at one point that "on this side and that the high rock grazes" – which certainly cannot be said of the ascent to San Miniato –, yet in its general configuration it brought back the memory of the road about which one early commentator writes: "On the right hand as one issues from the gate to go to San Miniato, one ascends by a road which afterwards divides into two branches and the one on the right of him who ascends has the stairway". This neighbourhood when Dante

knew it was not the civilized suburb that we see today but a wild and wooded outskirt of the city.

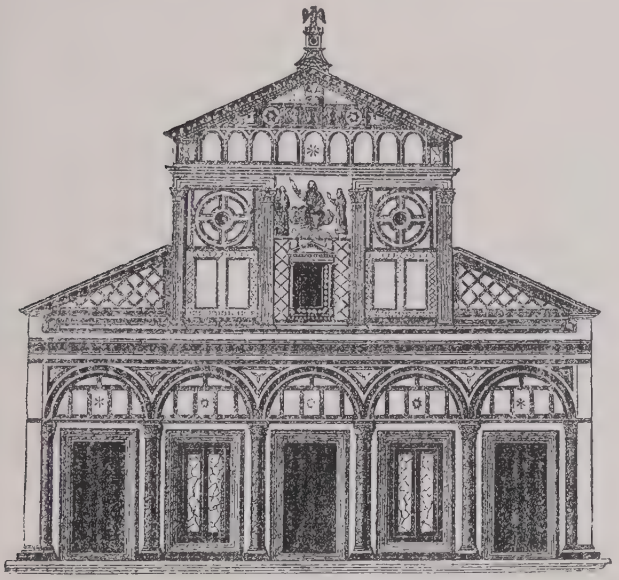
In other words: . . . . . in ascending to the mount where sits [rises] the church [San Miniato] [2] which subjugates [dominates] the well-guided [a sarcastic reference to Florence which in Dante's day was ruled by the dishonest and unscrupulous men to whom he refers in the last line] above Rubaconte [that is, above the bridge then called "da Rubaconte" and now "delle Grazie"] [3], the bold abruptness of the rise is broken [moderated] by the stairways made in old days when the ledger [the register of public accounts] [4] and the stave [the *staio* or bushel, measure of capacity] [5] were still safe; as who should say, the government of Florence has since passed into the hands of knaves and thieves.

NOTES.

[1] So called from the number of crosses that formerly bordered the ascent like a *Via Crucis.* This Epigraph has also been affixed at the beginning of Via San Miniato al Monte leading to Piazzale Michelangelo.

[2] Founded by Hildebrand, Bishop of Florence in 1013 on the hill then called Monte del Re, where a little

church dedicated to the martyred saint, San Miniato, [a son of the King of Armenia], and enshrining his relics, had existed from very early days. Hildebrand who is known in history as "a man of great courage and a thousand virtues" desired to raise a grand and stately basilica. He endowed it with rich prebends and other



San Miniato al Monte.

possessions and gave it in charge to the Black Benedictines, also known as Cluniacs, because they came from Cluny in Burgundy; monks famed for their learning and for the zeal with which they fought against simony. The church was indeed a magnificent monument, of which the fame soon spread all over Italy and beyond the Alps, so that even in Germany its beauty was spoken of with

praise. The Bishops of Florence who succeeded Hildebrand would seem, however, to have neglected their trust, so far as San Miniato was concerned, for at the beginning of the 13th. century, the Consuls of the Guilds were obliged to provide for its maintenance by placing it under the patronage of the Arte di Calimala [Guild of Traders in Foreign Wool] whose arms, an eagle grasping a wool-pack, may be seen on the façade. The Arte di Calimala responded nobly to the charge and by the end of the 15th. century San Miniato had been completely restored, decorated with splendid mosaics and enriched with beautiful works of Renaissance art. Among these are the sacristy, lined with frescoes by Spinello Aretino [circa 1385], the high altar designed by Michelozzo and adorned with terra-cottas by Luca and Simone Della Robbia, the chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal built by Antonio Manetti and decorated with medallions by Luca Della Robbia, sculptures by Rossellino and frescoes by Baldovinetto and Pollaiolo, and the Campanile begun in 1524 by Baccio d'Agnolo to replace an earlier one which fell down in 1499.

The miraculous Crucifix of San Giovanni Gualberto hung above the high altar until 1671 when it was removed to the church of S. Trinità.

The superb old battlemented palace, known as the Palazzo dei Vescovi, adjoining the church, was built in 1320. In the meantime, the Cluniac monks, greatly reduced in number, had left the convent, to be replaced by the Friars of Monte Oliveto who obtained permission to reside in the Palazzo dei Vescovi where they remained undaunted, so it is said, during the siege of Florence in 1529. Threatened by the allied forces of Pope and Emperor, who were determined to obtain possession of the city at all costs, the Florentines strengthened the fortifications of San Miniato and placed the defence in charge of Michelangiolo. The enemy attack was chiefly

San Miniato al Monte with its first Campanile which fell down in 1499.
(Plan of Florence from a 14th. century manuscript).

directed against the church which was the favourite aim of the German artillery encamped at Pian de' Giullari. The heroic Florentine gunner, Lapo, fired on the besiegers from the top of the Campanile which Michelangiolo protected as best he could by surrounding it with mattresses.

Florence fell in 1530 and San Miniato was turned into a fortress for the Spanish garrison in the pay of the Grand Duke Cosimo I. The foreign troops were finally withdrawn and in 1630 when the plague was raging in Florence, the empty barracks were used as a Lazaretto. Later, in 1697, they became a kind of refuge for the numerous beggars who infested the city streets and in 1705 the Grand Duke Cosimo III handed over the building to the Jesuits who reorganised it as a religious house of retreat. The Jesuit Order being suppressed in 1774, the house of retreat continued under lay administration and under the personal superintendence and guarantee of some Florentine gentlemen who founded the "Opera" or Corporation of Spiritual Exercises.

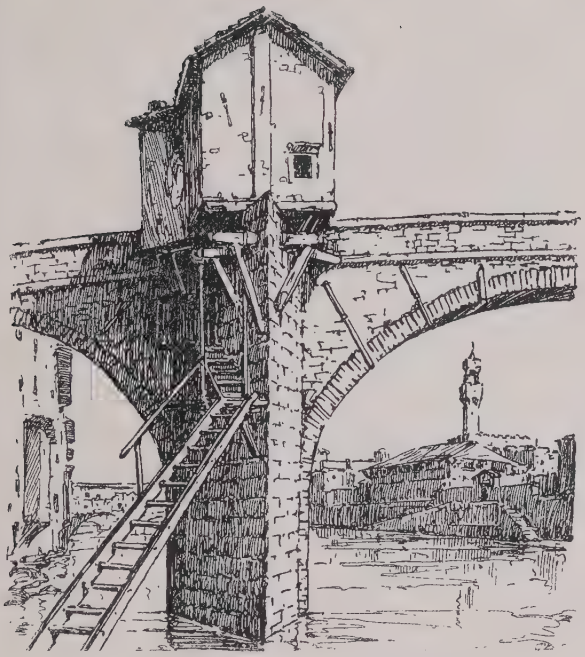
In 1783 the Friars of Monte Oliveto who had originally been evicted from S. Miniato to make room for the Spanish garrison, obtained permission to return to the convent where they remained until the suppression of all the religious orders by the French in 1810.

After such a series of vicissitudes, it is easy to imagine the deplorable condition to which the church, the convent and the Palazzo dei Vescovi were reduced and the amount of wilful damage done to this beautiful monument. Its troubles were not yet over, for in 1839 it was decided to create a monumental cemetery on the adjoining land, though one might have thought that other sites were not lacking, and the project, not commendable in itself, was carried out in a way that proved very deleterious to the basilica, for burials were permitted below the pavement of the nave and aisles, within the

Entrance to the fortress of Monte alle Croci.

side walls and in the crypt sacred to the relics of San Miniato. The Grand Duke Leopold II, placed the cemetery under the patronage of the Corporation for Spiritual Exercises on condition of their keeping the church in good repair with the funds derived from the sale of burying sites which, it was expressly stated, were to be devoted towards "restoring the Basilica to its ancient splendour". The restorations effected by the Corporation in 1860 certainly did not result in added splendour to the ancient monument and it is only of late years that important and really satisfactory restorations have been carried out both in the church and the Palazzo dei Vescovi of which the façade and part of the interior have been entirely renewed.
The Cemetery now belongs to the Commune of Florence and the Friars of Monte Oliveto once more officiate in the Basilica.

[3] "In the year of Christ, 1237", says the Florentine chronicler, Villani, "Messer Rubaconte da Mandello of Milan being Podestà of Florence, the New Bridge was made in Florence and he laid the first stone with his own hand and threw the first trowelful of mortar and from the name of the said Podestà the Bridge was named Rubaconte".
This bridge, afterwards called Ponte alle Grazie, was originally built with seven arches but in 1346 two were included in the mill-dam on the left bank of the river, since filled up to form part of the new quay. Small houses and chapels, including two convents of nuns and the celebrated Oratory from which the bridge takes its present name, were built on either side over the buttresses, forming one of the quaintest and most characteristic sights of old Florence. They were all demolished in 1874 when the bridge was repaired and widened and the Oratory of the Madonna delle Grazie which was held



One of the little houses on Ponte alle Crazie.

in great veneration by the population, was removed to its present site on the adjacent Lung'Arno.

[4] In 1290 a certain Monfiorito da Coderta, a poor gentleman of Padua, was Podestà of Florence. Instead of administering the public funds with honesty and justice he committed the most bare-faced frauds. Being deposed from his office and put to the torture, he confessed, among other things, that he had favoured a member of the Acciaioli family who ought to have been severely punished for his misdeeds. This same Acciaioli being elected Prior, tore a leaf out of the public records on which the truth concerning him was set down. The thing became known and he and his accomplices were convicted and condemned.

[5] About the same time, a certain Durante of the Chiaramontesi family, [" they who for the bushel blush "], whose office it was to distribute salt to the population, tried to make illicit gains by removing one of the staves of the bushel [*staio*] with which he measured out the salt. The fraud being detected, he was punished and a biting song in vituperation of the Chiaramontesi used to be sung in the streets.

Epigraph XI. – THE ARNO.

. . . . . SI SPAZIA
UN FIUMICEL, CHE NASCE IN FALTERONA,
E CENTO MIGLIA DI CORSO NOL SAZIA.

– DANTE – PURG. 'XIV' 16–18 –

. . . . . "There wanders
A streamlet that is born in Falterona,
And not a hundred miles of course suffice it"].

Longfellow's translation.

On the tower called "della Zecca Vecchia", in Piazza La Piave [1].

In the second Circle of Purgatory where the sin of envy is punished, Dante meets the spirits of two noble Romagnoles, Guido del Duca of Bertinoro and Ranieri di Calboli of Forlì. One of them asks him who he is and whence he comes. The question brings the thought of Florence into the Poet's mind together with a flood of bitter memories and, greatly perturbed, he answers ambiguously, without giving the exact name of his native city or of the river flowing through it. Then, putting the words into the mouth of Guido del Duca, he gives a graphic description of the whole course of the Arno and breaks out into one of his most fierce invectives against his ruthless enemies.

Here is a summary of the description of the Arno:

The streamlet rises in the "Alpine mountain" [the Falterona, one of the highest peaks of the Appennines] and "first directeth its impover-

ished way" [impoverished from lack of water] "mid ugly swine, of acorns worthier than other food" [an allusion to the inhabitants of the Casentino, impersonated in the family of the Conti Guidi di Porciano, the powerful overlords of the district]. Then coming down into the valley, it finds "snarling curs" [the Aretines] and "turns from them disdainfully its muzzle", that is, it deviates towards the east. "It goes on falling and the more it grows" the river finds the dogs turning into wolves [the Florentines, so called from their insatiable rapacity]. Then, "a maledict and maladventurous ditch", [of which the very name had best remain unknown to men] it crosses Florence and after Signa winds its way "through many a hollow gulf" until "it finds the foxes so replete with fraud [the Pisans], they fear no cunning that may master them", and shortly afterwards, ends its long course in the sea [2].

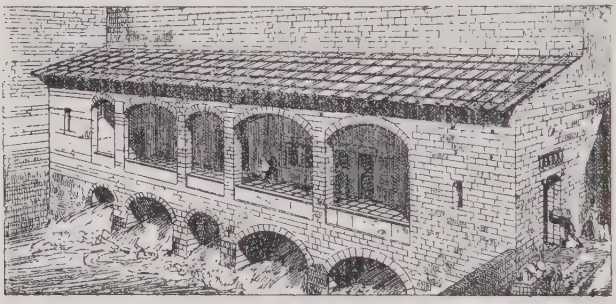
In other words: A streamlet born in Falterona wanders through the midst of Tuscany and [becoming a "beautiful river"] a hundred miles of course do not suffice it [that is, from its source to the sea the Arno is more than one hundred miles in length [3].

NOTES.

[1] Torre della Zecca Vecchia ["of the Old Mint"] is the name of the isolated dismantled tower standing in the middle of the Piazza near the Ponte di S. Niccolò, formerly called Piazza della Zecca Vecchia, and now, since the war, Piazza La Piave. The tower, originally Torre del Re, formed part of the third circuit of walls which were only demolished in our own times. Near it was a postern-gate called Porta della Giustizia or the Gate of Justice because beyond it was the field with the gallows where common malefactors, such as assassins and thieves, were hung. Nobles and those guilty of political crimes were beheaded in the courtyard of the Palazzo del Podestà [the Bargello].
The name "Zecca Vecchia" recalls the fact that this was the original site of the Florentine mint for which the water-power of the Arno was probably used. The New Mint or "Zecca Nuova" was situated on the right-hand side of the Loggia degli Uffizi where its fine entrance can still be seen.

[2] In addition to "the rivulets that from the verdant hills of Cassentin descend into the Arno", the river receives the waters of the Chiana, Ambra, Sieve, Ema, Pescia, Bisenzio, Ombrone, Pesa, Elsa, Era and many other little streams and torrents, including the Mugnone, near Florence.
The "proud river" and its banks have both changed aspect considerably since Dante's day, when, not being confined within strong embankments, it over-flowed freely into the plain, forming two branches [one going towards San Salvi and the other towards Pian di Ripoli] with long, woody islands in between.
Military defence-works were thrown up at various points

along its banks especially during the period of civil factions and a number of mills were built within the walls of the city in case of sieges and incursions.
The Arno would seem to have been far deeper in old days than it is now, for merchants vessels used to come up it from Pisa to Signa and the traffic was continued by barges on to Florence. There were apparently three ports; one at the Ponte alle Grazie, one near Ognissanti



The Mill of San Niccolò which existed in the 13th. century and was demolished in 1870.

and the third at S. Frediano. Signa also had three ports and the little townships of Fucecchio, S. Ellero and Figline had each a port. In the 17th. century, merchandise was brought by river from Pisa to Poggio a Caiano, going up the Ombrone in small boats. It is interesting to note that in 1421 when Filippo Brunelleschi was building the Cupola of the Cathedral, he was allowed to bring blocks of marble on a vessel of his own construction to Empoli and Castelfranco where the marble was transferred to boats and sent on to Florence.
Even now though the Arno is so "impoverished" that in many places it is possible to wade across it, it is apt to rise suddenly in flood owing to the nature and number of its affluents. "Arno non cresce se Sieve non mesce"

[" the Arno only swells when it mingles with the Sieve "] says the old proverb. And starting from 1178, history records no less than 46 disastrous inundations, of which the worst and the most famous was that of 1333. Villani who was an eye-witness, has left an alarming description of the calamity. It rained without ceasing for four days and four nights. The river rose ten braccia [19 ft.] " so that in the church and Cathedral of S. Giovanni, the water rose above the altar and covered more than half the height of the porphyry columns at the door, " and the column of S. Zanobi in Piazza S. Giovanni was swept away [see Epigraph VII]. The fury of the waters broke down the weir at Ognissanti, destroyed the three bridges, Carraia, S. Trinità and Ponte Vecchio, and damaged the Ponte alle Grazie. More than 300 persons were drowned and the city was half ruined. The Signoria elected Giotto as Master of the Works for the rebuilding and repairing of houses and public monuments and retained him in this post, in spite of his frequent absences to paint frescoes in other parts of Italy.

Two epigraphs affixed to the Ponte Vecchio [see Epigraph IV] record this terrible inundation and here and there in the old streets one comes across other inscriptions bearing witness to floods which devastated the city. Until the drainage of Florence was regularly systemised in our own day, all the drains debouched directly into the Arno. Now the sewerage of the streets and squares goes into one common collecting pipe which carries it off into the river below the town so that even if there should be a slight inundation, the water does not spread as formerly, in the basements of the houses, causing infinite damage and discomfort.

The Mugnone and two minor streams, the Terzolle and the Affrico, descend from the Fiesole hills. The Mugnone runs its course outside the city to the end of the

Cascine and falls into the Arno about six miles further on. But when Florence lay within its first circuit of walls, the Mugnone, passing by Cafaggio [the present Via dei Servi] lapped the ancient Roman walls on the north side [between the Baptistery and Borgo S. Lorenzo], then turning westward, it ran approximately down the present Via Panzani and Via Tornabuoni and fell into the Arno near the church of S. Trinità. A strong stream, it formed part of the defences of the city on that side, and did away with the need for deep ditches which were necessary at more exposed points. When the second circuit was built in 1178 the course of the Mugnone was deviated outside the new walls which it followed closely, ending in the Arno at Ognissanti. When the third and last circuit of walls was begun towards the end of the 13th century, the bed of the Mugnone was again altered in harmony with the new outline and it fell into the Arno at the present entrance to the Cascine, near the iron bridge. Then for various reasons, sanitary and otherwise, the course of the Mugnone was finally removed further from the city and turned towards the end of the Cascine.

[3] The historian Villani, a contemporary of Dante, says that the Arno runs for 120 miles. According to modern computation, it has with all its windings, a course of 241 kilometres or about 149 miles.

Epigraph XII. – THE DONATI.

. . . . . IL LOCO U' FUI A VIVER POSTO,
DI GIORNO IN GIORNO PIÙ DI BEN SI SPOLPA,
ED A TRISTA RUINA PAR DISPOSTO.

. . . . . QUEI CHE PIÙ N' HA COLPA,
VEGG' IO A CODA D' UNA BESTIA TRATTO
IN VER LA VALLE OVE MAI NON SI SCOLPA.

– DANTE – PURG. 'XXIV' 79–84 –

[" The place where I was set to live
From day to day of good is more depleted,
And unto dismal ruin seems ordained.

. . . . . him most guilty of it
At a beast's tail behold I dragged along
Towards the valley where is no repentence "].

Longfellow's translation.

On the tower [5, Via del Corso] once forming part of the Donati houses.

This Epigraph refers indirectly to two very distinct Florentine personalities, contemporary with Dante: Forese Donati whose name is slightly connected with the history of Italian satirical poetry and his brother, Corso Donati, a prominent if terrible figure in the political history of Florence. The first, also called Bicci, was "a very gluttonous man". An intimate friend and companion of Dante in the years following 1290 [that is, after the death of Beatrice and before the Poet married Gemma Donati] Forese owes his notoriety to the great part he plays in Cantos XXIII and XXIV of the Purgatorio and also to the fact that, as young men, he and Dante engaged in a contest or *tenzone* of satirical sonnets in which each indulged in abuse of the other.

Corso, "one of the noblest and most powerful citizens of Florence", was a brave knight but proud, restless and turbulent. He kept the city in continual uproar for many years owing to his quarrels and rivalry with the Cerchi which

ended by dividing the population into two factions, Bianchi and Neri, Corso being head of the latter and Vieri dei Cerchi of the former. [see Epigraph XVII].

Determined to rule Florence, defiant of all authority and insolent to the Signoria, Corso became odious even to his own Party and to the common people of whom, for his own ends, he pretended to be the protector. Finally the whole city rose up against him, and the Podestà, the Priors with their guards and officers and the trained bands marching in Companies, went to attack him in his own house situated near S. Piero Maggiore. After a stout resistance, Corso fled, overcome by numbers, and left the city on horseback, by Porta alla Croce. He was overtaken near Rovezzano and captured by certain Catalan knights in the pay of the Signoria who wanted to take him back to Florence but in attempting to escape he either fell or flung himself from his horse, his foot became entangled in the stirrup and the Catalans finished him by a spear-thrust in the throat.

The monks of San Salvi took up the body which was left bleeding in the road and buried it privately next day in the monastery.

The above notes make it easier to explain the meaning of the Epigraph.

In the VI Circle of Purgatory where the gluttonous are condemned to suffer hunger and

thirst within sight of trees laden with fruit and fresh springs of water gushing from the rocks, Dante meets Forese Donati to whom he recalls himself with a covert reference to their youthful friendship; " what thou with me hast been and I with thee ", [Canto XXIII, 116]. Continuing the colloquy after a long interruption, Dante, in the first *terzina* of the present Epigraph, deplores the rapid decadence and approaching ruin of Florence. Forese answers in the second *terzina*, predicting with the second-sight vouchsafed to the spirits of Dante's other-world, the sad end of his own brother, Corso Donati. This prophecy of Forese's, is a fine piece of imagery enabling Dante to depict, in powerful words the miserable end of the great head of the Black Party which occurred on October 6th., 1308, some years before the Canto was written.

In other words: The place [Florence] where I was set to live - says Dante to Forese - from day to day of good is more depleted and unto dismal ruin seems ordained.
But - answers Forese - I see him most guilty of it [his brother Corso Donati, chiefly responsible for the division of the Guelph Party into Blacks and Whites] dragged along at a beast's tail [at a horse's tail, the punishment inflicted on traitors] towards the valley [Florence] where

there is no repentence [where crimes are continually committed by our citizens, "obstinate in evil-doing"] [1].

NOTES.

[1] Speaking of the Donati family it is impossible not to mention Piccarda Donati, daughter of Simone and sister of Forese and Corso; now, as Forese tells Dante, among the Blessed in Paradise where the Poet meets her later in the course of his mystic journey:

> "*My sister, who, 'twixt beautiful and good,*
> *I know not which was more, triumphs rejoicing*
> *Already in her crown on high Olympus*".

Piccarda had been betrothed by her family to a certain Rosellino della Tosa but desirous of giving herself up to a religious life, she entered the convent of Santa Chiara at Monticelli, against the wishes of her relations. Corso heard the news at Bologna and furious with rage, he galloped back to Florence, attacked the convent with some of his followers, carried off Piccarda and forced her to marry Rosellino della Tosa. This sacrilegious act is recalled by Piccarda herself in the well-known lines [Canto III, Paradiso]:

> "*The men, accustomed unto evil more*
> *Than unto good, from the sweet cloister tore me*".

There are two versions of the sad end of this unhappy girl. One says that she implored heaven to allow her to die in chastity and her body being immediately covered by a horrible leprosy, she died abandoned by all: another relates that after her marriage, she wasted away in a slow decline.

Epigraph XIII. – THE PORTINARI.

SOVRA CANDIDO VEL CINTA D'OLIVA,
DONNA M'APPARVE, SOTTO VERDE MANTO
VESTITA DI COLOR DI FIAMMA VIVA.

– DANTE – INFA ' XVII ' 58-60 –

[" Over her snow-white veil with olive cinct
Appeared a lady under a green mantle,
Vested in colour of the living flame "].

Longfellow's translation.

On Palazzo da Cepparello, 4 Via del Corso [1]. It refers to Beatrice, a daughter of the wealthy Portinari family who once had their houses here [2].

Dante had almost reached the limits of Purgatory and was about to be initiated into the sublime visions of Paradise, when his Beatrice, "the lady of his mind", appeared suddenly before him for the first time, in a blaze of light, surrounded by angels singing and scattering flowers and clad in the colours of the Theological Virtues. She did not reveal herself at once to the Poet, yet from "occult virtue that from her proceded" he felt the old love stirring again within him; his whole soul became exalted and he broke forth into the wonderful verses that "say of her what was never yet said of any woman".

In other words: A lady appeared to me [whom he afterwards knew to be Beatrice] crowned with olive [symbol of Wisdom and Peace] over a snow-white veil [colour of Faith] and garbed in red [colour of Charity] beneath a green mantle [colour of Hope].

NOTES.

[1] This palace was built in the 16th. century, as their principal residence, by the Salviati family. In carrying out the works, it was found necessary to incorporate the houses of the Portinari family which extended as far as the corner of Via dello Studio. It was in this palace that Maria Salviati, grandaughter of Lorenzo il Magnifico and wife of Giovanni de' Medici, known as Giovanni delle Bande Nere, reared and educated her son, Cosimo, afterwards the first Grand Duke of Tuscany. In 1760 the palace belonged to the Riccardi; in 1803 it passed from them to the Da Cepparello who kept it until 1866 when Florence became the capital of the Kingdom of Italy. The new Government acquired the building for the Ministry of Grace and Justice and after the capital was transferred to Rome in 1870, it belonged successively to the Commune, the Cassa di Risparmio [Savings-bank] and the Scolopian Fathers. Now it is again the seat of a bank [the Credito Toscano] which has had it completely restored, endeavouring, so far as possible, to adapt the old historical rooms to the needs of a modern banking-establishment.

[2] Two famous members of the Portinari family are known to us: Folco; a generous and high-minded man, the munificent founder of the Hospital of San Matteo [1285], out of which the present important Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova has grown; and Beatrice, his daughter, "Bice with the saintly eyes", who inspired Dante and was eternalised by him in his sublime Poem. He said of her what had never yet been said of any woman; extolling her as a living and beautiful human creature in his "Vita Nuova" and transfiguring her into a mystical allegory in the Divina Commedia.
This unparalleled exaltation of so simple and modest a

creature as Beatrice, may be considered by some as only the vision of a poet's dream, unconnected with any real woman, but modern scholars are fully convinced of the actual existence of Beatrice, apart from the fact that Boccaccio and Pietro Alighieri [Dante's eldest son] both speak of her in this sense.

It will not be out of place here to say a few words about the Poet's early love-story which might possibly be wrongly interpreted by readers not aware of certain mediaeval customs and ideals.

To understand the essence of this genuinely spiritual passion, we must remember that in the middle-ages, in Florence as elsewhere, marriages between high-born youths and maidens were very rarely love-marriages. They were contracts arranged by the parents, often while the future bride and bridegroom were still children and based on mutual interests, generally political. The civic warfare raging almost without intermission in Italian cities was broken at times by truces and pacifications and the continuance of these was guaranteed by alliances between members of the contending families. Thus, Guido Cavalcanti was married to Bice Uberti, daughter of the famous Farinata; Dante Alighieri to Gemma Donati; Cino da Pistoia to Margherita degli Ughi; Bandino Falconieri to Ravignana dei Bardi and Simone Bardi to Beatrice Portinari.

The bride submitted with a good grace to her fate and devoted herself wholly to her household and her – generally numerous – children. The men might be merchants, soldiers or statesmen, but if they were *dicitori per rima*, or verse-makers, it was considered permissible

for them to express in poetry all the emotions and ideals for which they had no scope in the austere routine of daily life, and this without any prejudice to their characters as excellent husbands and fathers. "They fixed on some beautiful woman as the object of their fervent admiration; they thought of her, to her they addressed their verses, rejoicing in her smiles, sighing for her absence, sharing in her griefs, weeping over her tomb and cherishing her memory" [Del Lungo]. At the dawn of Italian literature, love was the one and only theme of poetry written in the vulgar tongue; songs, sonnets and ballads were always dedicated to "la donna mia", the "gentle lady" who was not the poet's wife but whose identity was always perfectly well-known to friends and neighbours. Nowadays such a custom would be antagonistic to all our social conventions but in the 14th. century it was never the cause of jealousy. It never disturbed the conjugal peace of the wife of the poet or of the husband of the lady in whom he found inspiration. It was really a highly idealized Platonic affection of which Dante's love for Beatrice, "a most honourable love" as Boccaccio calls it, is an excellent example.

Dante first met Beatrice when he was about nine years old ["before I was out of childhood"] at a May-day festival at the house of Folco Portinari. "And among the crowd of children was a daughter of the aforesaid "Folco whose name was Bice [although Dante always "called her by her full name Beatrice] and who was "then about eight years old. She was very graceful and "pretty in her girlish way, and very gentle and pleasing "in her manners and more grave and modest in her "demeanour and speech than might have been expected "of her years. Besides this the features of her face "were very delicate and regular and full not only of "beauty but of such comeliness and charm that by many "she was held to be little short of an angel. She then,

" such as I describe her, or it may be, far more beautiful, " appeared at this feast, not as I suppose for the first " time but for the first time with the power to kindle " love, before the eyes of our Dante " [Boccaccio].

We know nothing more about Beatrice except that Dante was a friend of one of her brothers [she had five brothers and six sisters]; that she married Simone dei Bardi but apparently had no children and that she died very young. Boccaccio states that all his information about Dante's love for Beatrice was given him by one " worthy of belief, who had known Beatrice and was indeed, nearly related to her ". Formerly when it was the fashion to disbelieve in Beatrice as a real person, Boccaccio's assurances carried very little weight but now, thanks to the assiduous studies of the eminent Dante scholar, Michele Barbi, there is no longer any doubt on the subject and the absolute truth of Boccaccio's assertions is fully acknowledged.

The informant " worthy of belief " was Monna Lippa Mardoli, a second cousin of Beatrice, of about her own age. After Boccaccio returned to Florence from Naples in 1340, he took up his residence with Monna Lippa who was his step-mother's sister and remained with her until her death. It was she who in her extreme old age, confirmed many of the incidents related in the " Vita Nuova ".

Epigraph XIV. – CACCIAGUIDA.

FIORENZA DENTRO DALLA CERCHIA ANTICA
OND' ELLA TOGLIE ANCORA E TERZA E NONA,
SI STAVA IN PACE, SOBRIA E PUDICA.

– DANTE – PARA. 'XV' 97–99 –

[" Florence, within the ancient boundary
From which she taketh still her tierce and nones,
Abode in quiet, temperate and chaste "].

Longfellow's translation.

Via Dante Alighieri, near the side entrance to the Badia.

This is the first of a series of seventeen Epigraphs all taken from Cantos XV and XVI of the Paradiso. They refer exclusively to Florence, to Dante's ancestors, to pride of birth, and to the differences between the old and new generations of citizens.

The Poet has entered Paradise and has ascended to the Fifth Heaven or Sphere of Mars where he finds the Blessed who died fighting for the faith of Christ. He is met by the spirit of his own great-great-grandfather, Cacciaguida, who describes the peaceful, happy state of Florence as it was during his own life-time [in the 12th. century] when the city was still enclosed "within the ancient circuit" [1].

Florence was but a small place then and its territory did not extend beyond Trespiano on the north and Galluzzo on the south ["and at Galluzzo and at Trespiano have your boundary"]. "The city properly so called was surrounded by the narrow circuit of walls dating from

Roman times [2]. True they enclosed lofty towers and turreted houses, [3] and building went on apace and the suburbs outside the gates extended in all directions, while the narrow streets hummed with the varied activities of industry and commerce; [4] yet in spite of it all, Florence was still a little city „ [5]. [Davidsohn]. The inhabitants were, probably, about 14,000, a fifth of those in Dante's day [See Canto XVI: "a fifth part of those who now are living"], when the population numbered some 70,000. The Florentine historian, Giovanni Villani [1280-1348], has left a graphic picture of Florentine life in those early mediaeval times which reads like an echo of Cacciaguida's words.

"The citizens of Florence lived soberly and on coarse food and with little spending; and in manners they were in many respects rough and rude; and both men and women went clad in coarse garments, many even wearing skins unlined. They wore boots on their feet and caps on their heads and the Florentine women wore shoes without ornaments and even the greatest were content with one close gown of scarlet serge or camlet, belted and buckled after the ancient fashion, and they wore hooded cloaks lined with miniver; and the common women went clad in coarse green cloth of Cambrai, after the same fashion [6]. One hundred lire was the common dowry for a bride and two or

three hundred lire was held to be excessive; and most of the girls were twenty years old or more before they were wedded. Such were the simple habits and plain customs of the Florentines of that day; but they were true and loyal to one another and to their Commune and with their homely mode of life and their poverty they did greater and more virtuous things than are done in our own times with greater wealth and luxury ".

" Near these ancient walls of Florence " - it is again Villani who speaks - " was the church of the Benedictines called Badia [See Epigraph XXIV] where the bells rang so regularly for public prayers at the hours of Terce, Sext and None.... that they were the clock of the Florentines ", [1] and by them the artisans knew when to begin and to leave off work.

In other words: When Florence was within the ancient circuit [said Cacciaguida] from which [that is, from the Badia Church] she took both Terce and None [she was regularly made aware of the hour], she " abode in quiet [led a tranquil, exemplary life] temperate [in eating and drinking] and chaste " [with virtuous customs which had not yet been corrupted].

NOTES.

[1] Dante by "the ancient circuit" means the Roman walls which historians generally call "the first circuit".

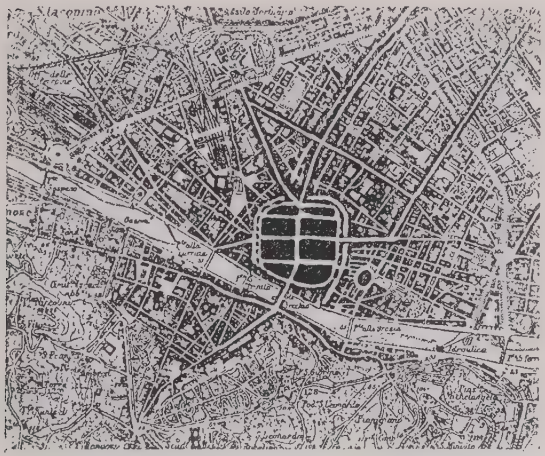
[2] "It is now generally believed that Florence was founded by a Roman military colony about the middle of the first century, B. C, for the double purpose of defending the pass of the Arno and quelling the restless and factious city of Fiesole" [Davidsohn].

[3] If we are to believe Villani, there were 150 towers in Florence, each 120 braccia [180 ft.] high, belonging to private houses, besides the towers of the wall and the tower of the Palazzo della Signoria.

[4] Via Calzaioli for instance [formerly Corso degli Adimari] was so narrow that very few people could walk there and pass one another [See Epigraph XXII].

[5] Florence had, successively, three circuits of walls. The first or "ancient circuit" mentioned here by Dante, was very narrow, almost quadrangular in shape and measuring about 500 metres [546 yards] on one side [from the opening of the present Borgo San Lorenzo to near the Ponte Vecchio] and rather more on the other side [from the beginning of Via della Spada near Palazzo Strozzi to the Canto dei Pazzi in Via del Proconsolo]. The perimeter of the first circuit was therefore. approximately, 2 kilometres [one mile and a quarter]. "About the middle of each side there was a gate between two round and very strong brick towers, and the walls were also of brick. There were other towers standing at regular intervals along the walls to strengthen their powers of defence, of which, however, they were not called upon to give proof until some centuries later" [Davidsohn].

In Cacciaguida's day the gates were as follows: Porta Santa Maria [close to Ponte Vecchio, by Via Lambertesca, and so called from a neighbouring church, Santa Maria sopra Porta, afterwards known as San Biagio]; San Pancrazio or Brancazio [at the opening of Via della Spada]; Porta San Pietro [at the Canto dei Pazzi]; and Porta del Vescovo [at the opening of Borgo San Lo-



The first circuit of walls and the Florentine amphitheatre.

renzo] There were also four smaller gates called posterns. The second circuit, begun about 1173, was not much wider than the first one. It extended along the right bank of the Arno between Ponte della Carraia and Ponte delle Grazie and its northern boundary did not go beyond Piazza del Duomo. Porta Santa Maria was brought a little nearer to Ponte Vecchio and Porta San Piero was moved to the Canto alle Rondini [corner of Via Pietrapiana].

The enlargement of the first circuit was due to the ne-

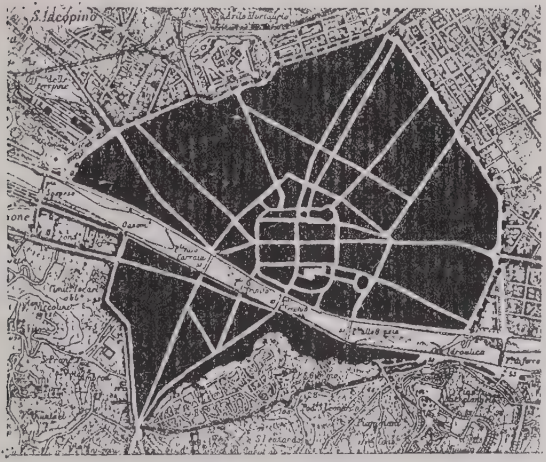
cessity of including within the walls for purposes of defence, the populous *borghi* or suburbs that had sprung up outside the four principal gates. Later on new *borghi* spread outside the walls of the second circuit and had eventually to be taken in within a third and last circuit which extended to the left bank of the Arno and covered a far wider circumference than was really necessary.

Second circuit of walls and Oltrarno quarter.

This is the circuit of which Dante saw the beginning in 1284 and which was finished in 1327, six years after his death. With the exception of a few small modifications, it remained intact until well after the middle of the nineteenth century, being finally destroyed to allow for the development of modern Florence.

The suburbs which sprang up on the left bank of the Arno in connection with the Ponte Vecchio, during the period of the second circuit of walls, were Borgo Santa

Lucia [now Via dei Bardi], Borgo Sant'Iacopo [the Santo Spirito quarter] and Via Carraia [part of the present Borgo San Frediano]. They grew to be very important *borghi* with palaces and towers owned by powerful families, though they were outside the walls and undefended except by palisades. They terminated in three gates; Porta Romana or Porta S. Niccolò [near Santa



Third and last circuit of walls.

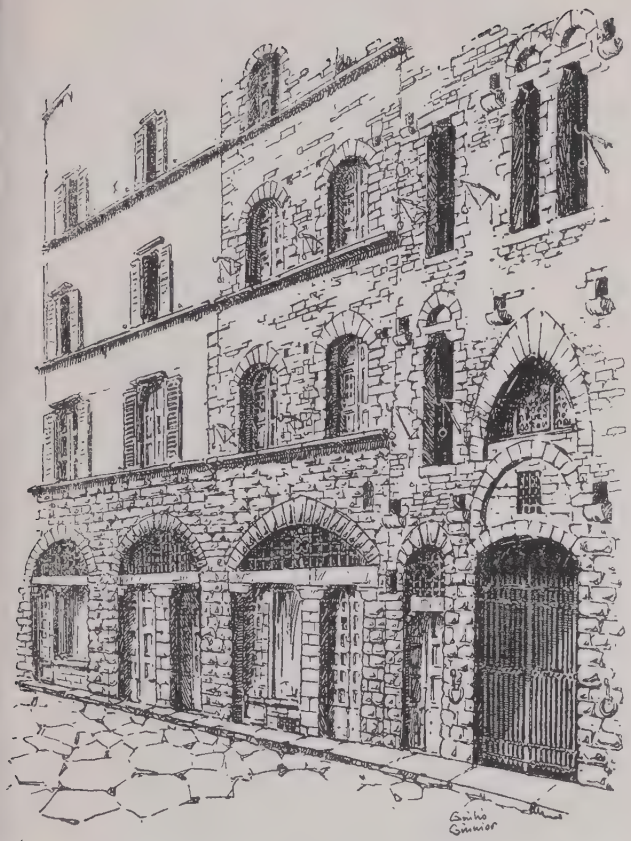
Lucia dei Magnoli], Porta di S. Piero Gattolino or Porta Senese [near the church of Serumido] and Porta Pisana or Porta San Frediano [at the present Piazza del Carmine].

In 1258 when the populace seized the government of the Republic and banished the most powerful Ghibelline families, they built a fortified wall all round the Oltrarno district to defend it from possible assaults from the exiles gathered together at Siena, but these walls had nothing

to do with the seond circuit of which they formed a large semi-circular excrescence. A good part of them were incorporated with the walls of the third circuit begun twenty-six years later [1284] and fragments of them may still be seen on the hill of San Giorgio, a survival of mediaeval fortifications built with stones taken from the demolished towers and palaces of the Ghibelline lords.

[6] These fashions are very different from those depicted in decorative art and on the stage.

[7] Speaking of the division of the hours, Dante uses the Latin terms current in his day: *Prime*, *Terce*, *Sext* and *None*. These words, eommon to nearly every part of the Roman Empire, served to denote four divisions of the day and night. They were called *temporal* or unequal hours because, following the course of the sun which varied with the seasons, they were none of them fixed except *Sext* which marked the middle point of the day or night. The Catholic Church, built up upon the ruins of Paganism, adopted these terms in computing the eight divisions of the daily office of prayer and praise: *Matins*, *Lauds*, *Prime*, *Terce*, *Sext*, *None*, *Vespers* and *Compline* [the canonical hours]. The temporal hours thus included with the canonical hours became as time went on a regular civil institution and their solar variations governed the civic day for centuries. "These hours" said Dante in the "Convivio" "are long or short, by day and night, as the day and night increase or diminish".
The use of bells became general about the 9th. century and the Florentine Badia was probably one of the first churches to adopt this means of calling the faithful to prayer and at the same time of marking the passing of the hours for, says Villani "it was ordered that the



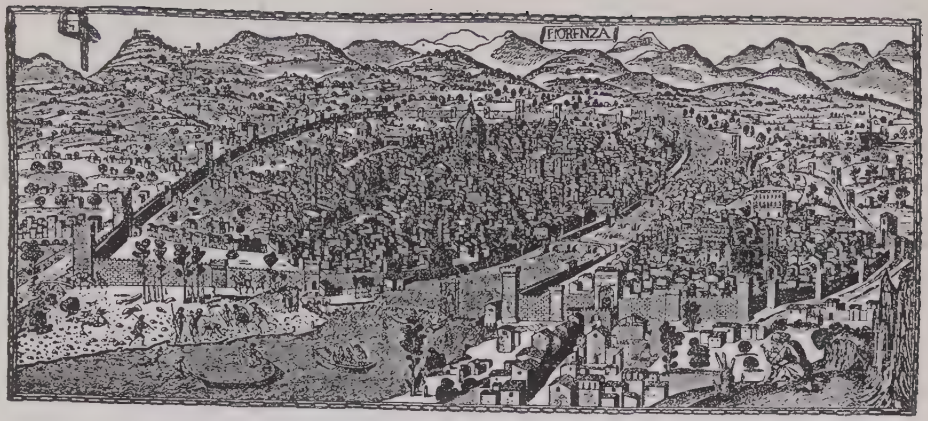
Houses and shops in Borgo San Jacopo, recently restored, with the tower which is thought to have been the residence of the fire brigade.

bells should ring, to the honour of God, the hours of the day and of the night". Ecclesiastical phraseology therefore passed into common use to denote alternate periods of rest and labour in the twenty-four hours. As time went on, slight variations were made in the canonical hours: *None* took the place of *Sext* and signified the middle of the day [noon]; *Vespers* no longer marked the late evening and the hours were also subdivided by adding the terms, *half-terce* and *half-vesper*, etc. *Sext* dropped out altogether, except as an expression used by scholars.

The Italian invention of mechanical tower-clocks which dates from the beginning of the 14th. century, brought about a new division of the day into twenty-four equal parts [the astronomical hours], beginning with midnight, and thereafter the names of the canonical hours were only retained in church use and in connection with religious functions.

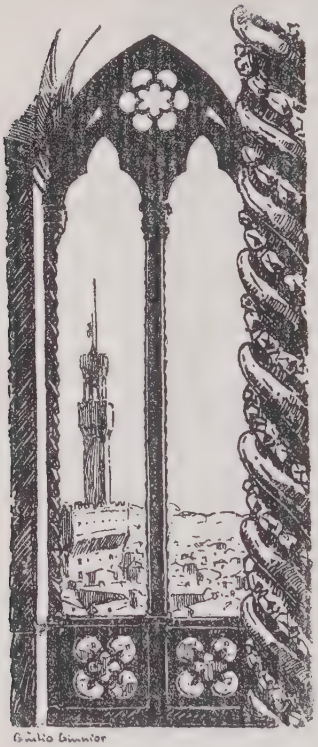
In Dante's day, the church bells rang out the canonical hours, day and night and they were tolled to give warning of fire or as a call to arms, but otherwise they were always silent. Today cathedral bells only ring for *Matins*, *Terce*, *None* and *Vespers* which correspond approximately to 6, 9 and 11.30 in the morning and to 3.30 in the afternoon. They also give warning of the *ventitrè* [the hour before sunset], the *ventiquattro* [the hour of sunset] and the *un'ora* or first hour after sunset also called *ora di notte* or night hour; and at certain seasons of the year they ring out the curfew.

All through the middle-ages and until the 15th. century, the hours were also marked by public sun-dials. We know that in Florence the Ponte Vecchio [see Epigraph IV], the Ponte S. Trinita and the Ponte alla Carraia all had sundials. Indeed, the Carraia sun-dial would seem to have been quite an artistic object, consisting of a column surmounted by a statuette of a boy holding



Florence within the third circuit of walls [from a 15th. century wood-cut].

up the semi-circle of the hours inscribed with verses on time, by the Florentine poet, Benivieni [15th. cent.]. This dial was thrown down by a storm in 1552. The Ponte alle Grazie probably had its gnomen too, but we are without documentary evidence on the point.



A window of Giotto's Campanile.

We will end these brief notes on public clocks in the middle-ages by recalling that the first tower-clock in Italy belonged to the church of San Eustorgio in Milan and was constructed in 1309. The first public tower-clock in Florence was that of the Palazzo Vecchio which struck the hours for the first time on March 25th., 1353 – the first day of the year according to the Florentine calendar [see Epigraph I]. This clock was made by a mechanician who had his work-shop in Via Buia, which on this account was afterwards known as Via dell'Oriuolo or Clock-street.

Epigraph XV. – BELLINCION BERTI.

BELLINCION BERTI VID' IO ANDAR CINTO
DI CUOIO E D'OSSO, E VENIR DALLO SPECCHIO
LA DONNA SUA SENZA IL VISO DIPINTO!

– DANTE – PAR. 'XV' 112–114 –

[" Bellincion Berti saw I go begirt
With leather and with bone, and from the mirror
His dame depart without a painted face "].

Longfellow's translation.

In Via del Corso, near the corner of Via del Proconsolo.

If the preceding Epigraph gives us an idea of the quiet life led by Florentine citizens in the good old days, the present one offers us an admirable example of domestic virtues.

Bellincion Berti, of the noble family of the Ravignani, lived in the second half of the 13th. century. We know very little about him except that he was a valiant knight and that Villani calls him " the best and most honoured gentleman in Florence " [1]. He had a considerable part in the negociations with Siena for the cession of Poggibonsi to the Florentines and he brought to a satisfactory conclusion the long and complicated question about the boundaries of the Chianti district.

Dante calls him " Great Bellincione " and exalts his virtues and those of his wife who did not follow the general custom of painting her face. He was the father of the good Gualdrada of legendary memory, who married Guido Guerra, a powerful and bitter enemy of the Florentines

and head of the noble family of the Conti Guidi, Lords of the Casentino and of many castles in the Valdarno. And if the love of his wise and beautiful consort by whom he had a large family, did not suffice to check the licence of his manners and habits, it did so far soften his heart that he gave up his enmity with Florence [2].

In others words: Even Bellincion Berti [says Cacciaguida] did I see go simply attired, with leather and with bone fastenings [not silk or precious metals] and I saw his wife come away dressed from her mirror, with, a face untouched by paint.

NOTES.

[1] The houses of Bellincion Berti extended from Santa Maria in Campo to the Canto dei Pazzi [along the present Via del Proconsolo]: by Gualdrada's marriage they passed to the Conti Guidi from whom they were purchased in 1280 by the Cerchi [see Epigraph XVII].

[2] In connection with this marriage Villani tells a romantic tale wich is also mentioned by other historians. Guido Guerra married Gualdrada "for her beauty and for a fair speech which he heard her make in the Cathedral Church of Florence.... When the Emperor Otho IV came to Florence and saw the fair ladies of the city assembled in Santa Reparata in his honour, this maiden pleased him most of all, and her father saying to the Emperor

that he had it in his power to make her kiss him, the maiden made answer that no man living should kiss her

The Castello of Poppi belonging to the Conti Guidi where Dante stayed in 1310.

save he were her husband. For the which speech the Emperor much commended her and the said Conte Guido being taken with love of her by reason of her graciousness, by the counsel of the said Emperor Otho, took her to wife".

[3] Notwithstanding the simple living and good customs of Bellincion Berti and his wife, things were not quite so ideal in the days of Cacciaguida as Dante imagined them, and described them in this and the preceding *terzina*. Political passions burnt so strong within the Poet that he could not miss an opportunity of harping on the defects of his own contemporaries.

Recent researches into the domestic life of mediaeval Florence coupled with documents that have come to light,

reveal the quiet, sober way of living in another aspect. Florence, as we have seen, was but a small city with narrow shut-in streets overhung by tall towers; even the best houses were like gloomy, massive fortresses with small rooms and windows filled in with glazed linen. The dark hovels of the poor were truly miserable. The streets were paved with brick and "heaped up with filth, crowded with domestic animals of every description and often flooded with water from the dye-works and tanneries or with the blood of slaughtered animals" [Guido Biagi]. Clothes and hanks of wollen yarn, after they had been washed, were hung out together from the windows to drip with impunity upon the passers-by.

Latrines were a luxury only used by the rich. "The poorer people had no conveniences of any kind in their dwellings so the condition of the neighbourhood can be imagined" [Davidsohn].

"Even in wealthy families, it was customary for several persons to sleep together in one bed, without nightclothes" [Guido Biagi].

It is said that the Florentines were temperate in drinking and that their meals were frugal and never more than two a day; but they ate with their fingers and two of them would use the same wooden platter. One pewter cup and one knife did for all.

Painting the face would seem to have been an old custom among the women and among the foolish young gallants who imitated them. Wigs were worn made of horse-hair and of hair cut from the heads of the dead.

The less we say about personal cleanliness the better. Inventories of trousseaux and household furniture of an even later date which have come down to us, show that mediaeval ladies lacked things which even the humblest modern woman would consider indispensable.

All the rich merchants kept female slaves purchased in the markets of the East where they traded. It was a bad

custom which led to domestic dissension and disorder and only came to an end in the first half of the 16th. century. Twenty children were quite an ordinary family and there were always a certain number of illegitimate infants who were brought up with the others. Chess was a favourite game and games of dice and hazard were much in vogue, as involving no mental effort and making time pass easily and pleasantly.

The Florentines were very fond of practical jokes, which were always stupid and brutal and often cruel. Wandering mountebanks and clowns were the favourite victims. It must not be supposed, however, that only the Florentines lived in this way. These manners and customs were common to all the mediaeval world.

Santa Maria Novella with its ancient Campanile which was entirely altered during the restorations of 1778.

Epigraph XVI. – DANTE'S ANCESTORS.

GLI ANTICHI MIEI ED IO NACQUI NEL LOCO
DOVE SI TROVA PRIA L'ULTIMO SESTO
DA QUEL CHE CORRE IL VOSTRO ANNUAL GIOCO

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 40–42 –

[" My ancestors and I our birthplace had
Where first is found the last ward of the city
By him who runneth in your annual game "].

Longfellow's translation.

No. 3, Via degli Speziali.

This Epigraph refers to the origin of the Alighieri family which, in spite of much research and discussion, has never been clearly established to the satisfaction of scholars. The Poet who was evidently proud of his "nobility of blood" [1] lays stress upon the fact that the ancestors of Cacciaguida from whom he was descended [he addresses Cacciaguida as "my beloved root ancestral"] lived in the centre of the city, an unequivocal sign that they belonged to the old nobility. He uses a periphrase and in an admirably expressed *terzina* he recalls the route taken by the "palio" or horserace which was run every year on the feast of St. John the Baptist, the Patron Saint of Florence. This "annual game" took place in only two of the city wards [2], the Sestiere of San Pancrazio where the race began and the Sestiere of Porta San Piero where it came to a finish. The horses dashed through the Mercato Vecchio [3] the boundary of the first Sestiere and turned into

the Via degli Speziali [4], the beginning of the second Sestiere where stood the houses of the Elisei in one of which Cacciaguida was born. We know nothing more about the origin of Dante's ancestors except this probable connection with the Elisei, though even this is doubtful. True, Dante makes Cacciaguida say [Canto XV] "Moronto was my brother and Eliseo" but there is no proof of the actual existence of these two brothers.

Cacciaguida himself was at one time believed to be a mythical personage, created by the Poet's imagination but recent researches make it fairly certain that he was born between 1090 and 1091 and died before he was sixty. It also seems likely that Cacciaguida - as Dante asserts in Canto XV - was born in Florence and baptised in the "beautiful St. John"; that he married a lady from the valley of the Po [Ferrara?] and died fighting against the infidels [5].

A further proof of Cacciaguida's existence is found in a document preserved in the Florence State Archives which says that in 1189 two of his sons, Preitenitto and Aldighiero, were living in Florence. This Aldighiero had a son called Bellincione who in his turn became the father of another Aldighiero, the father of Dante.

As to the origin of the sirname Aldighiero, about which much has been written, we will limit ourselves to quoting Boccaccio's vivid com-

ment: "When Cacciaguida was young, his parents gave him to wife a maiden of the Aldighieri family of Ferrara [6], who was highly thought of for her beauty, her virtues and the nobility of her blood. He lived with her many years and they had a number of children. The elder ones having all been named, she desired, like women do, to renew the name of her own ancestors and so she called one son Aldighiero which, by subtraction of the letter *d*, afterwards became Alighieri ".

In other words: My most remote ancestors and I [says Cacciaguida] were born where the horse that runs the palio for your San Giovanni [7], your annual game, first meets the second Sesto [that is, reaches the beginning of the Sesto di San Piero] which is the last Sesto through which the race is run.

NOTES.

[1] The original population of Florence consisted of Romans and Fiesolans. Dante claimed descent from the former and expressed his opinion of the inhabitants of Fiesole in no measured terms in Canto XV of the Inferno:

" *Their litter let the beasts of Fiesole*
Make of themselves, nor let them touch the plant,
If any still upon their dunghill rise,

In which may yet revive the consecrated
Seed of those Romans who remained there when
The nest of such great malice it became".

[2] When Florence was still enclosed within the first circuit of walls, with only four principal gates, the city was divided into four Quarters; when the second circuit of walls was built, the division was made by Sixths or Sestieri: The Cathedral, Porta San Piero, San Pier Scheraggio, San Pancrazio, Borgo and Oltrarno. In 1343 the city was again divided by Quarters: Santo Spirito, Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella and San Giovanni.

[3] This is the Mercato Vecchio or Old Market which we have seen very badly "restored to new life from secular squalor" through the partial demolition and subsequent restoration of the Centre of Florence.

[4] Only the name remains of this narrow old street which was entirely rebuilt during the above-mentioned restorations [carried out in 1890]. It originally formed part of the Roman *decumanus* and the most ancient Florentine families had their palaces here. The name signifies the Apothecaries Street and it used to be known as "Via degli Speziali grossi" because it contained more wholesale than retail dealers.

[5] Probably not against the infidels of the Holy Land but against the Saracens who had invaded Calabria, "that execrable race" as Cacciaguida calls them in Canto XV of the Paradiso.

[6] It is believed that the Alighieri were court jurists in the suite of the Emperor Conrad of Suabia.

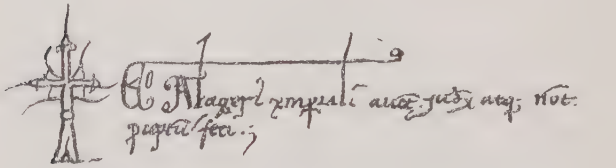
[7] The "palio", a horse-race without riders, was started by the Florentines in 1288 when they were besieging Arezzo, to show their contempt for their foes. It afterwards became a yearly event in Florence, held to commemorate great feats of arms and reached its zenith under the Republic and the Medici Grand Dukes when all festivals, civil or religious, were carried out with great splendour. By the 18th. century the races had lost much of their primitive character and original significance; they were no longer in harmony with the spirit of the times and were finally abolished altogether in the 19th. century. The "palio" of San Giovanni was run on June 24th. in honour of the "Protector of the Florentine city and State". The owner of the winning horse received the "palio" a "very large and rich" length of velvet embroidered with silk and fine gold, sometimes reaching the value of 600 florins. In 1459 it was decreed that the *palio* should not cost more than 350 florins. With time, the custom of giving the actual *palio* died out and was replaced by a sum of money.

On the feast-day "in the afternoon", writes the chronicler Goro Dati [1363–1435], "when people have dined and rested a little according to their pleasure, all the women and girls go out to see the horses pass. The course lies in a straight line through the centre of the city where there are more fine houses belonging to wealthy citizens than in any other quarter and here the women stand in the streets strewn with flowers, in all their fine jewels and rich adornments; and there is high festivity. And there are many gentlemen and knights and foreign gentlemen who come every year from neighbouring cities to see the beauty and magnificence of this festival. And the Corso is so full of people that it must be seen to be believed and no one who has not seen it can even imagine it".

The race was run parallel to the course of the Arno but

against the current, the start being at a little bridge over the Mugnone, just outside Porta al Prato, which on this account became known as Ponte alle Mosse [or the starting-bridge]. The horses came into the city through Porta al Prato and ran down Via San Paolo [now Via Palazzuolo], Via Strozzi and Mercato Vecchio [all in the Sestiere of San Pancrazio]; then down Via degli Speziali, the Corso, Borgo degli Albizi and Via Pietrapiana [all in the Sestiere of San Piero] to Porta San Piero Maggiore [Canto alle Rondini] where the race ended. In 1389 after Via Borgognissanti had been straightened and widened, the horses went by that street instead of by Via San Paolo and in 1596 the start was at Porta al Prato and the finish at Porta alla Croce.

It was a cruel sport, recalling the barbarous amusements of the ancient Romans. Excited and frightened by the shouts and cries of the crowd, and goaded by the *perette* [metal balls with spikes] which were fastened to their sides and acted like spurs as they ran, the poor animals lost all control and it was no easy matter to check their headlong course when they reached the goal; indeed the men who managed this part of the race often did so at peril of their lives.



Facsimile of an autograph of Alighiero Alighieri, Dante's father. [Ego Alagerius imperiali auctoritate judes atque notarius ec.: praeceptum feci – 1239].

Epigraph XVII. – PORTA SAN PIERO.

. . . . . LA PORTA CHE AL PRESENTE È CARCA
DI NUOVA FELLONIA DI TANTO PESO
CHE TOSTO FIA JATTURA DELLA BARCA.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' – 94–96

[. . . . . "the gate that is at present laden
With a new felony of so much weight
That soon it shall be jetsam from the bark"].

Longfellow's translation.

At No. 2 Via del Corso, almost at the corner of Via del Proconsolo [Canto dei Pazzi].

These two streets, the Corso and Via del Proconsolo, form an intersection called Canto dei Pazzi from the name of the noble Florentine family, not yet extinct, who once owned all the houses in the immediate neighbourhood. The only one remaining is the magnificent 15th. century palace built by Jacopo Pazzi from a design by Brunellesco.

When Florence was still limited by the first circuit of walls, this was the site of one of the four city gates, called Por San Piero from the name of a church close by, San Piero Maggiore. The gate in turn gave its name to one of the Sixths of the city, Sesto di Por San Piero known as the "Sesto degli scandali" [the scandalous Sesto] because the number of powerful families in the vicinity gave rise to constant strife and jealousy.

The disturbing element was represented chiefly by the Cerchi, "rude and savage men" who came to Florence from the Piviere d'Acone in

Val di Sieve, and soon enriched themselves with trade [1]. In 1280 they bought the houses and property belonging to the Conti Guidi, the legitimate descendents of the Ravignani [see Epigraph XV]; with time they gradually became owners of almost the whole Sesto di San Piero where their arrogant display of wealth roused envy and hatred in other families who, though not so rich. were of older nobility.

Among these were the Donati, knights and warriors but poor and not very poverful, who felt themselves put into the shade more than ever by the ostentatious grandeur of the Cerchi. "Thus ill-breeding on the one side and disdainful envy on the other, caused discord to break out between them", and the rivalry was such that discord soon led to provocations, frays and fierce acts of vengeance which kept the city in a continual uproar and divided it once more into two factions, the Bianchi and the Neri. Vieri dei Cerchi was head of the former and Corso Donati of the latter. This was the beginning of fratricidal strife, assassinations, banishments and revenge, ending in the untoward intervention of both Pope and foreigner.

Note Dante's strict sense of justice. Although he himself had sided with the "White" party, he deals out equal blame to all the authors of "the city's ill".

In other words: The Gate [Porta San Piero] that at this time [1300] is laden with a new felony [spirit of revolt and treachery among the "new folk"] of so much weight [of such continual danger from the presence of the Cerchi] that very soon it will sink the boat [that is, it will bring about the ruin of Florence, or, according to other commentators, the ruin of the Cerchi or the White Party].

NOTES.

[1] The Beata Umiliana dei Cerchi [1216–1246] belonged to this turbulent family. She was a model of Christian virtue married to a dissolute Florentine gentleman who made her very unhappy: after his death she retired to the top of a tower belonging to her family and gave herself up to a life of penance and contemplation, only leaving her retreat from time to time to visit and comfort the sick poor.

[2] The "houses, palaces, squares, courtyards, gardens, tenements and goods" belonging to the Cerchi extended over three parishes: Santa Maria in Campo, Santa Margherita and San Procolo. [The ancient church of San Procolo stands at the corner of Via Pandolfini and Via dei Giraldi with its façade turned in the opposite direction to the one it originally faced].

Epigraph XVIII. – THE GALIGAI.

. . . . . ED AVEA GALIGAIO
DORATA IN CASA SUA GIÀ L'ELSA E 'L POME.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 101–102 –

[. . . . . "already Galigaio
Had hilt and pommel gilded in the house"].

Longfellow's translation.

In Via dei Tavolini, near the corner of Via dei Cerchi.

The Galigai, noble Ghibellines of the Sestiere of Porta San Piero, stand out conspicuously among the "great Florentines of whom the fame is hidden in the past", praised by Cacciaguida. They had the proud distinction of wearing swords with "hilt and pommel gilded", an honour only granted in those days to nobles who had been knighted by the Emperors of Germany. It is said that a certain Buonaguisa de' Galigai was the first among the Crusaders of 1217 to scale the walls of Damietta and hoist thereon the standard with the Lily of Florence. Like many another of the best and most important families in Florence, the Galigai, involved in citizen strife, were sent into exile – "the exile that deprived Guelph Florence of so many of her citizens".

In other words: The Galigai family was distinguished by its high nobility, entitling its men to wear swords with gilded hilt and pommel.

Epigraph XIX. – THE UBERTI.

OH, QUALI IO VIDI QUEI CHE SON DISFATTI
PER LOR SUPERBIA!

– DANTE – PAR. ' XVI ' 109-110 –

[O how beheld I those who are undone
By their own pride!].

Longfellow's translation.

In the first courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio, beneath the loggia on the right-hand side.

This is undoubtedly an allusion to the noble race of the Uberti "who held their heads so high before Florence was divided by factions [Guelphs and Ghibellines] that they were almost like the fathers of the city" [Villani]. Their houses extended from the formidable fortress on the Arno, called Castello di Altafronte [Piazza dei Giudici] to San Piero Scheraggio [Via della Ninna] [1] occupying a great part of the area afterwards covered by Piazza della Signoria where they clustered thickly round the Gardengo tower [2] and reached out to San Simone. There are many legends about the origin of this famous family, one of which proclaims them the descendents of Catilina. It is generally believed that they came into Italy from Germany with the Emperor Otto I [951] but history is silent about them untill 1174 when we find them mentioned among the proudest and most powerful citizens in Florence. In 1177 they rebelled against the Government of the Consuls

and fomented the first of those popular risings which so embittered Florence even before the murder of Buondelmonti in 1215 with the complicity of Schiatta degli Uberti [see Epigraph XXVIII]. After this tragic event the Uberti knew no peace. Fanatical adherents of the Emperors, they were of course unswerving supporters of the Ghibelline faction and were prominent for the next half century in all the civil wars in Florence, endeavouring by every means in their power, loyal or disloyal, to break the Guelph party. They conspired, they burnt, they fought; they hired troops, provoked frays and instigated fierce wars. Immensely powerful and of reckless courage, they and their "consorteria" of San Piero Scheraggio were dreaded and hated by the citizens.

Sometimes they were victorious and then they held the government of the city with despotic sway; sometimes they were defeated and exiled, to wander about Tuscany and plot fresh vengeance with indomitable pride; finally the day came when they were expelled for ever and forced to seek permanent refuge in other countries [3]. Various branches of this great Ghibelline family survived until the 18th. century, in a long line of statesmen, warriors, merchants, artists and poets [4], among whom are two outstanding figures of a saint and a hero: - S. Bernardo degli Uberti and Farinata. The first, a "very

perfect, gentle knight", retired from the world into a monastery while still quite young and rose to the highest grades of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. From Abbot of San Salvi he became successively General of the Vallombrosan Order, Cardinal and Vicar of the Church in Lombardy. He died Bishop of Parma in 1135; the Church numbered him among her saints and Florence dedicated to him a votive chapel where the Priors of the Arts were wont to hold services [5]. Manente degli Uberti called Farinata, was a magnanimous hero and ardent lover of his native city. After the Ghibelline victory of Montaperti in 1260, he put aside all idea of vengeance, checked the slaughter of the vanquished Guelphs and prevented "with open face" the threatened destruction of Florence [see Epigraph III]. This act of splendid patriotism won him no gratitude from his fellow-citizens nor did it avail to stem the tide of vengeance that later rose and swept away his whole house. The Uberti were all expelled in 1266 and so intensely were they hated that the Florentines even forbade the cult for San Bernardo degli Uberti who had been dead nearly a century and a half and replaced him in the chapel of the Signoria by another saint of the same name but of foreign origin [6]. They burnt and destroyed the Uberti houses and property, "everything connected with them being shunned as if leprous" [7], and decreed

that every law promulgated by the Commune in favour of readmitting political exiles into Florence should begin with these words: "To the honour of the present State and to the destruction of the Uberti and their followers etc." There was even a legend [which only died out quite recently] that the triumphant Guelphs added the following vicious ejaculatory prayer to the Church litany: "Ut domum Ubertam eradicare digneris - Te rogamus - Audi nos" [*We pray Thee deign to root out the house of Uberti: We beseech Thee to hear us*]; or more simply: "Ab Ubertis libera nos, Domine" [*From the Uberti save us, Good Lord*]. Barbi has however proved that this enormity had its origin in an arbitrary supposition of Padre Cesari [1760-1828] which, passing through successive commentators, ended by being accepted as a fact.

What seems really certain, as it is mentioned by all the chroniclers, is that when the Palace of the Commune was designed in 1298 [8] the architect, Arnolfo di Cambio, was obliged to build it, not "out of square" as Vasari asserts, which would have been a discredit to Arnolfo's genius, but out of the centre of the Piazza, so as to avoid building on the ground once occupied by the houses of the hated Ghibelline chiefs.

In other words: Oh, how great [says Cacciaguida] did I behold the Uberti who are now undone [defeated and in exile] through their pride!

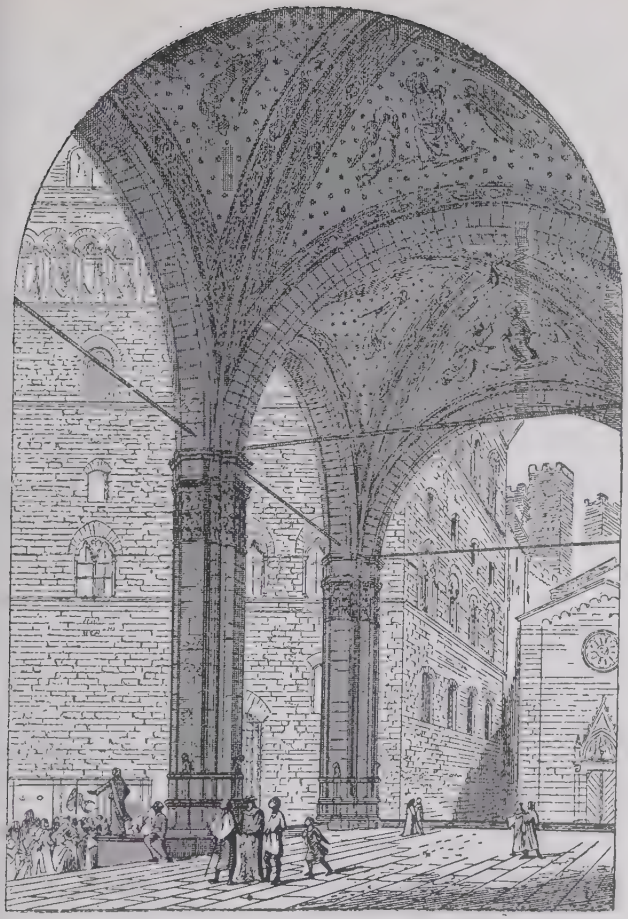
NOTES.

[1] The church of San Piero Scheraggio which gave its name to one of the Sestieri of the city, stood on the east side of the present Uffizi. It dated from 1062 and the Palazzo della Signoria from which it was separated only by a narrow street, was built in 1298. To widen this thoroughfare the north aisle of the church was demolished in 1410 and the south aisle was turned into a chapel for the Compagnia della Madonna della Ninna, one of the numerous confraternities of Florence. The whole church was finally incorporated with and absorbed by the new Uffizi buildings in the 16th. century. Some fragments of the ancient fane were brought to light a few years ago in Via della Ninna and an inscription placed over them recalls the fact that when the People's Councils were held in San Piero Scheraggio, Dante's voice was heard among them. Given the Florentine custom of holding public discussions on political matters in churches until the Government of the Republic had its own seat in Palazzo della Signoria, it is by no means improbable that Dante may have sat here with the other Priors in 1301, to urge resistance to the outrageous demands of Pope Boniface VIII, bent on dominating Florence and Tuscany.
When the church of San Piero Scheraggio was suppressed in the 18th. century, the marble pulpit, a beautiful piece of Romanesque work, adorned with reliefs representing

scenes from the life of Christ, was assigned by canon law to the church of San Leonardo in Arcetri outside the Porta San Giorgio, which depended from San Piero Scheraggio, where it is still preserved.
Towards the end of 1926 when part of Via della Ninna was being dug up, the foundations of the ancient church came to light and it was found possible to make an accurate ground-plan of the building, showing that far from being a small edifice, as some writers assert, it was one of the largest churches in the city.

[2] The Gardengo was an ancient watch-tower built by the Lombards in the 6th. century for the defence of the city. It afterwards gave its name to the surrounding area, now included between Piazza San Firenze and Piazza della Signoria. Here, as we have said, stood a number of the Uberti houses which were burnt and razed to the ground in 1266 by the two Frati Gaudenti acting jointly as Podestà of Florence. The foundations of these houses were discovered in 1875 when some drainage works were being carried out in Piazza della Signoria, in front of Palazzo Uguccioni.

[3] The defeat and death of King Manfred at Benevento in 1260 disarmed the arrogance of the Ghibellines who felt themselves lost, deprived of his protection. Therefore at Easter in 1266 they left Florence never to return and with them went all the Uberti to begin "their wandering, adventurous life, now obscure, now illustrious, according as Fortune smiled on them or their own capacity helped them on" [Renier]. "They had rebelled against their native city for more than forty years", says Dino Compagni's Chronicle "and they never found grace or mercy. They lived abroad in great state and held their honour high, consorting always with kings and nobles and accomplishing great deeds".

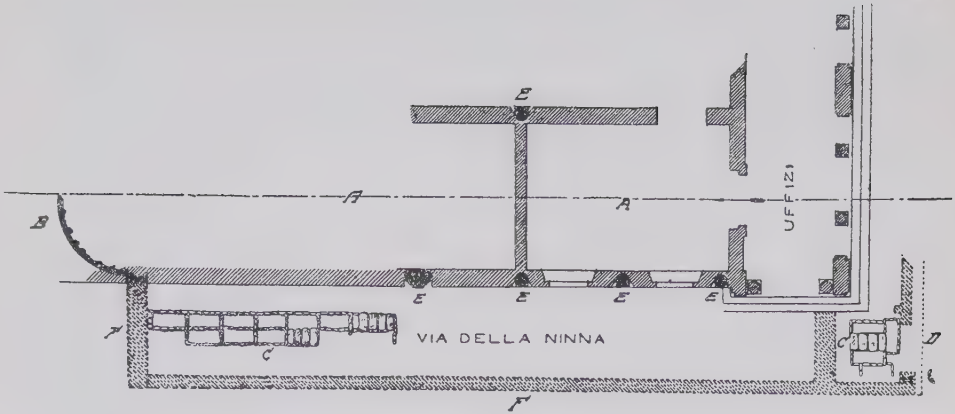


The church of San Piero Scheraggio, seen from the Loggia dei Priori.

[4] We come across traces of the Uberti in many different places. They were Podestàs at Verona and Senators at Venice; merchants at Padua, Perugia and Mantua and in France and Spain. Fazio degli Uberti, the great-grandson of Farinata, was a lyric poet and author of a didactic poem, the "Dittamondo", a pale imitation of the "Divina Commedia". Another member of the family, Prospero Uberti, who lived at Venice, was a poet, while Pietro Uberti, also settled in Venice, was a painter.

[5] It was the custom at that time and for centuries afterwards, that the Priors of the Arts, after their election, should attend a service of prayer in a special chapel, before entering on the discussion of State affairs. "Religion and patriotism were then one and the same thing and the most devout believers were the most ardent upholders of liberty; in Florence love of religion and love of liberty died together" [Franceschini].

[6] There is reason to believe that the chapel for the use of the Signoria attached to their different residences was dedicated to San Bernardo degli Uberti until 1266 the year of the final expulsion of the Ghibellines from Florence. The Florentine saint was then replaced by a French saint of the same name, – St. Bernard of Clairvaux [or Chiaravalle] the promotor of the second Crusade, to whom the chapel in the new Palazzo della Signoria was dedicated. The Vallombrosans, however, never failed in their cult for the former General of their Order and when in the first half of the 14th. century they founded a hospice for poor pilgrims in Via S. Paolo [now Via Palazzuolo] they decorated the Oratory annexed to it with frescoes representing scenes from the life of San Bernardo degli Uberti, first honoured and then repudiated by the Florentines.



Ground plan of San Piero Scheraggio. - *A)* The nave. – *B)* Part of the wall of the crypt. – *C)* Tombs with human bones. *D)* Traces of the pronaos. – *E)* Pilaster and columns. – *F)* Foundations of the left exterior wall.
Total length about 50 metres [162 ft.].

When the hospice was given up, the Vallombrosans sold the building and the site to the nuns of St. Martin in Via della Scala. This convent being in its turn, suppressed, the Oratory was demolished but the frescoes were saved by the munificent art-lover, Mr. John Temple Leader, who purchased them and had them carefully removed to the Castle of Vincigliata where they adorn the walls of the Council Chamber.

[7] With materials provided by the demolition of the Uberti houses at San Simone, the victorious Guelphs built in 1304 the fearsome prisons called "le Stinche" in which they confined their political adversaries, and any citizens who proved factious or turbulent. This prison occupied the site between Via San Simone, Via dei Lavatoi, Via Ghibellina and Via Giuseppe Verdi and derived its name from the fact that the first prisoners to be incarcerated there were rebels from the Stinche castle in Val di Greve [belonging to the Cavalcanti] who were defeated by the Florentines and brought in triumph to the city. Later insolvent debtors were also sent to the Stinche and by a cruel law introduced by the Republic in 1398 any one of these unfortunate men could be called upon to carry out the duties of the public executioner, if this functionary happened to be lacking. Women of ill fame and lunatics were also confined in the Stinche which was finally demolished in 1835 to the great benefit of the neighbourhood and replaced by decent houses and a riding-school which was afterwards turned into the huge theatre originally called "Pagliano" from the name of the builder and now "Giuseppe Verdi". A concert-hall which still exists, the "Sala Filarmonica", was also built over part of the site once occupied by the Stinche, and here, on the staircase wall, is to be found the only surviving trace of this terrible jail, a Giottesque fresco representing the expulsion of the

The Stinche Prison.

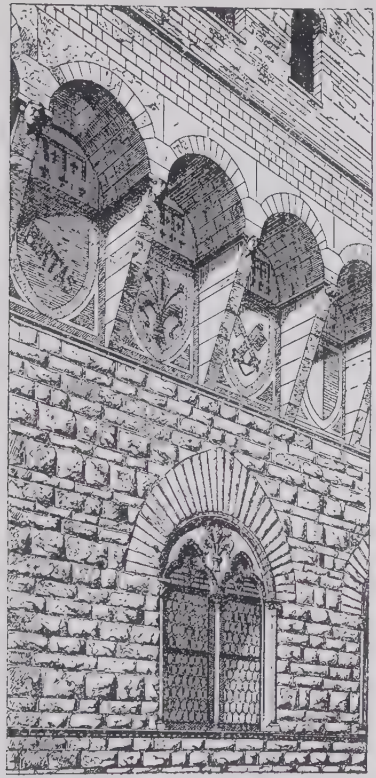
Duke of Athens with a view of the Palazzo Vecchio in the back – ground. –

[8] This magnificent monument erected to the triumph of Florentine democracy, was designed in 1294; the foundations were laid in 1298 [according to our present calendar, in the early months of 1299] and the palace was finished in all essentials by 1314. Its first name was Palazzo dei Priori, and it was also called Palazzo del popolo and later Palazzo dei Signori. The Medici Grand Dukes resided there for a time and transformed the whole building with the impress of their despotism. When in 1550 Cosimo I and Eleonora di Toledo transfered their court to Palazzo Pitti, the Palazzo della Signoria became known as Palazzo Vecchio to distinguish it from the new ducal Palace.

Summit of Arnolfo's tower.

Before the Palazzo della Signoria was built the Priors who were in office had no fixed residence but were housed in different parts of the city: in the Castagna tower that still stands in Piazza San Martino facing the houses of the

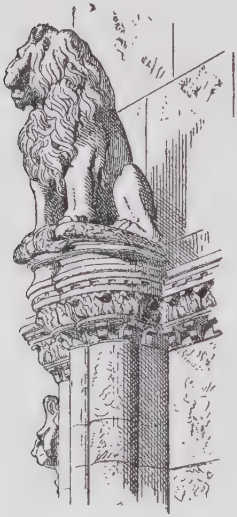
Alighieri and which then belonged to the Benedictine monks of the Florence Badia; in two other houses which they hired, belonging to a Forese and a Pera, and then



Detail of Palazzo della Signoria.

in a building in Via San Procolo [Via dei Giraldi] owned by the Cerchi family; finally in the spring of 1299 when the houses that were to form the famous palace were

being adapted for the purpose, the Signoria, brooking no further delay established themselves in them, just as they were and initiated the "Palagio dei Priori". [Del Lungo].



One of the sixteen "marzocchi" or little lions adorning the Loggia dei Priori.

Epigraph XX. – THE LAMBERTI.

. . . . . E LE PALLE DELL'ORO
FIORIAN FIORENZA IN TUTT' I SUOI GRAN FATTI.

– DANTE – PARA. ' XVI ' 110–111 –

[. . . . . " and how the Balls of Gold
Florence enflowered in all their mighty deeds "].

Longfellow's translation.

In Via de' Lamberti, near the Canto di Pellicceria.

This Epigraph marks the site where the houses and towers of the Lamberti family once stood. The Lamberti belonged to the ancient Florentine nobility and were the first to have their shield charged with six golden balls on an azure field, a token, at that time, of very distinguished lineage. They were descended from a German baron, Lamberto, who came into Italy in the tenth century with the Emperor Otto I of Saxony. They were Lords of Calenzano and of other castles which were demolished by the populace in the 12th. century during the riots against the old territorial magnates. The Lamberti being forced to come into Florence, fixed their residence in the Sesto of San Pancrazio near the Mercato Vecchio where they had splendid palaces and numerous towers.
They sided with the Uberti in the first outbreak of civil strife in the city [see Epigraph XXVIII] and, fierce Ghibellines by race and tradition, they consistently fought against the Guelph

Party until they were finally and permanently exiled from Florence [1].

In other words: The Golden Balls [The Lamberti] were a credit to the city in all its great deeds [that is, they cooperated with the Commune on all great occasions and shared the honours of victory].

NOTES.

[1] As an instance of their warlike spirit we may recall Mosca dei Lamberti who pronounced the famous phrase, "Cosa fatta capo ha" [that is, "do it and make an end of it"] with reference to the murder of Buondelmonte [see Epigraph XXVIII] which proved "an ill seed for the Tuscan people"; and Gherardo Lamberto called Ciccia, who led the Ghibelline army against Florence at Montaperti dividing the honour of the victory with Farinata degli Uberti.

Epigraph XXI. – THE VISDOMINI.

COSÌ FACEAN LI PADRI DI COLORO
CHE, SEMPRE CHE LA VOSTRA CHIESA VACA,
SI FANNO GRASSI STANDO A CONSISTORO.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 112–114 –

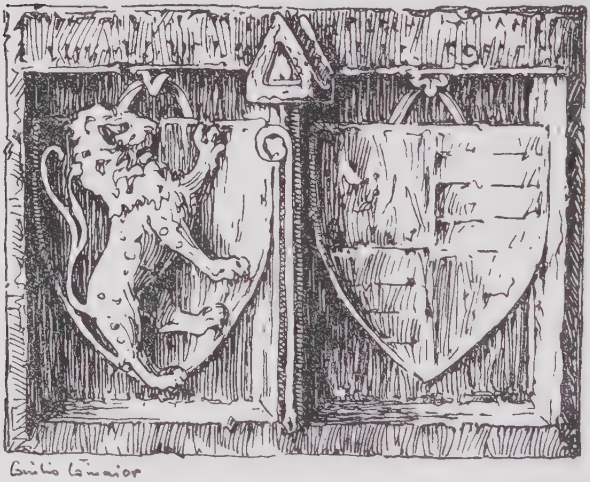
[" So likewise did the ancestors of those
Who evermore, when vacant is your church,
Fatten by staying in consistory "].

Longfellow's translation.

In Via delle Oche, affixed to the remains of an old tower which once formed part of the Visdomini houses.

Whenever the See of Florence happened to be vacant, the Visdomini had the right, until the nomination of the new Bishop, to instal themselves in the episcopal palace and administer the Church revenues ad interim. This privilege dated from the tenth century when it was the custom to call distinguished citizens of blameless character to fill this office during a vacancy in the See, rather than the clergy; hence the name *Vicedomini.* The privilege remained in one family and the descendents of those on whom it was originally conferred, assumed the name definitely and became one of the richest and most powerful clans in Florence. Their houses extended from Via delle Oche as far as the site afterwards occupied by the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and their name was given to a postern gate in the neighbourhood. In Dante's day the Visdomini were noted for the illicit gains made by them and their kinsfolk [the Tosinghi, Cortegiani, Alietti and Della Tosa]

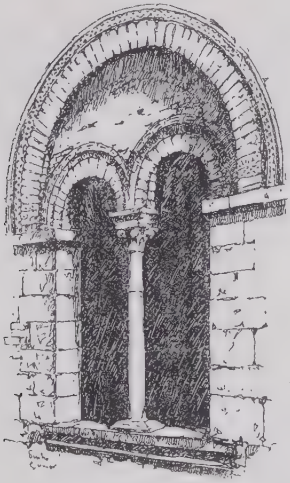
during the interregnum between one bishop and another; hence the invective placed by the Poet in the mouth of his ancestor, Cacciaguida, almost as though he wished - by antithesis - to throw



The Visdomini coat of arms.

a good light on the original members of the family. It is, indeed, a matter of history, that the degenerate descendents of the first honest administrators, used to do all in their power to delay the election of a new bishop so as to keep the large episcopal revenues and rich prebends in their hands as long as possible.

In other words: Like the other ancient Florentine families already mentioned [in Cacciaguida's preceding words] the ancestors of the Visdomini and their kinsfolk, prospered and were an honour to the city, whereas now they fatten and enrich themselves whenever the episcopal See is vacant, gathering together in the bishop's palace and holding consistory with the clergy of the diocese; doing aud undoing at their will, during their temporary administration.



Window of the old episcopal palace [work of the 13th. century].

Epigraph XXII. – THE ADIMARI.

L'OLTRACOTATA SCHIATTA CHE S'INDRACA
DIETRO A CHI FUGGE, ED A CHI MOSTRA IL DENTE
OVVER LA BORSA COME AGNEL SI PLACA.

– DANTE – PARA. 'XVI' 115–117 –

[" The insolent race that like a dragon follows
Whoever flees, and unto him that shows
His teeth or purse is gentle as a lamb "].

Longfellow's translation.

At No. 7, Via delle Oche, where the Adimari and their kinsfolk the Cavicciuli, had their houses.

This atrocious insult is hurled by the indignant Poet, through his ancestor, Cacciaguida, at one of the principal families of the Florentine nobility, although in the line which follows, "already rising was but from low people" he also implies that their origin was perhaps nothing to boast of.

It is not possible to explain the real motive of this invective which is not justified by any known historical fact; on the contrary, it is well known that the Adimari were one of the old, aristocratic families who dwelt within the first circuit of walls; that they were rich and powerful, with numerous kinsfolk and adherents, and that their castles, towers and houses extended all along the street called after them, Corso degli Adimari.

They were related to the Alberti, Imperial counts of Magona and Vernio and also to other illustrious personages of the period, including kings and princes [1].

Perhaps some feeling of personal resentment blinded Dante to the extent of making his ancestor speak as though he ignored the fact that none of the noble families of Florence and very few of those belonging to other Italian cities, could boast such ancient lineage as the Adimari.

Like other noble families in the middle-ages, the Adimari did not keep aloof from political events. They sided with the Guelphs in the factions that rent the city and were persecuted by their adversaries, their houses razed to the ground and they themselves sent into exile [2]. Not even the story that a certain knight, Boccaccio dei Cavicciuli Adimari [3] allowed himself to be insulted and beaten for love of money, can justify an invective throwing contempt on all the members of an illustrious house. It is true, however, that this knight, a black Guelph, perhaps a brother and certainly a relative of Filippo Argenti, of whom we spoke in the first Epigraph, was one of the most violent in opposing Dante's return to Florence and that he demanded and obtained the confiscation of Dante's property. It is therefore easy to understand that, smarting under the misery of unjust exile, Dante should have given way to bitter feeling against the Adimari, thinking of the part played by members of that family in his misfortunes.

The Adimari tower at the corner of Corso degli Adimari
now Via Calzaioli.

In other words: The insolent, arrogant consorteria or clan of the Adimari who turn like dragons on those who are afraid and become like lambs when others show their teeth or their purse.

NOTES.

[1] Marquis Boniface, Duke of Spoleto and Camerino who lived in the first half of the 10th. century, was brother-in-law to Rudolph II, King of Italy and Burgundy. He had three sons; Conte Adimaro from whon the Adimari were descended; Duca Teobaldo, the ancestor of the Alberti and Willa, wife of Hubert of Brandenburg, Marquis of Tuscany and father of the "great baron" [see Epigraph XXIV].

[2] The houses of the Adimari and their connections extended from Via degli Speziali [Canto del Giglio] to Piazza del Duomo. The present Via dei Calzaioli which was enlarged in 1844 between Or San Michele and Piazza del Duomo, was known in the middle-ages as Corso degli Adimari.

[3] One of the many branches of the Adimari family allied itself with the people [became democratic] and took the sirname of Cavicciuli. They enriched themselves with commerce and rose to a high degree of importance.

Epigraph XXIII. – PORTA DELLA PERA.

NEL PICCIOL CERCHIO S'ENTRAVA PER PORTA
CHE SI NOMAVA DA QUEI DELLA PERA.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 125-126 –

["One entered the small circuit by a gate
Which from the Della Pera took its name"].

Longfellow's translation.

Situated at the entrance to Borgo dei Greci on the side of Piazza S. Firenze, where one of the secondary or postern gates of the first circuit of walls is supposed to have existed.

With these two lines Cacciaguida wishes to lay stress on the great modesty and simplicity of his contemporaries who saw nothing amiss in the fact that one of the city gates should be called by the name of a private family, and that family not even one of the most important or celebrated for great deeds. All we know about the Peruzzi family of that period is summed up in a short passage in the Fourth Book of Villani's Chronicles: "And behind San Piero Scheraggio where are now the houses of the Filippetti family, dwelt they of Pera or Peruzzi, and from this name the postern which was there was called Porta Peruzzi; some say that the Peruzzi of today are descended from this lineage but this I do not affirm" [1].

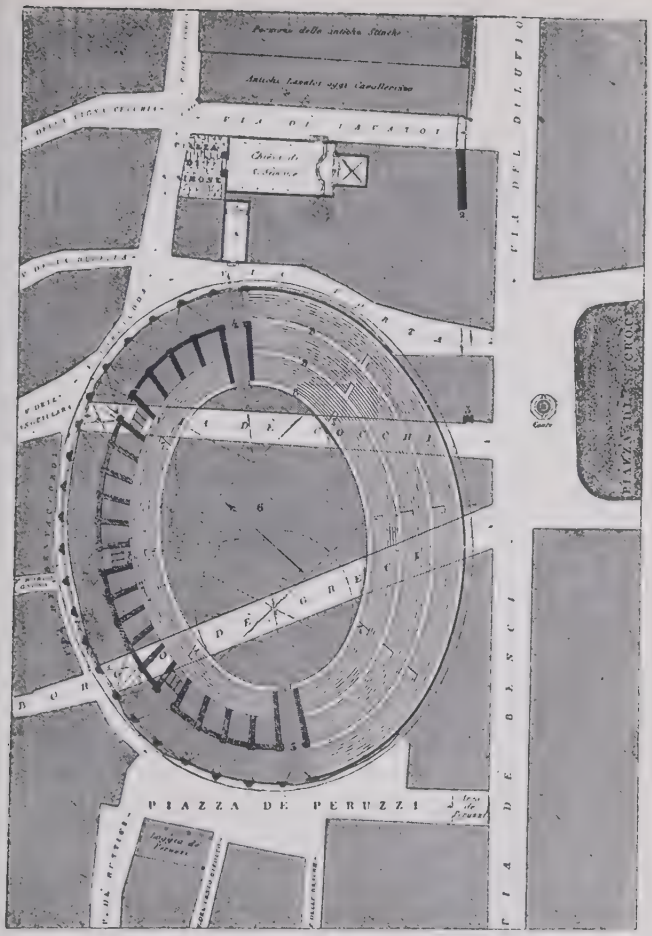
In other words: One entered the small or first circuit of walls through the gate named after the Della Pera family.

NOTES.

[1] Notwithstanding Villani's statements, the question is an open one; it is doubtful whether this gate really derived its name from the Della Pera who were extinct in the 13th. century, and still more doubtful whether there was any connection between the name of the gate and the Peruzzi, the founders of the famous Florentine banking-house who in 1135 and 1140 were still filling the humble office of business "agents for monasteries and paying the bills for the nuns of Santa Felicita" [Davidsohn], and were far from possessing the great wealth to which they had attained in Dante's day, as bankers and money-changers [see Epigraph VI].

Part of their houses, dating from the 14th. century, were built upon the boundary walls of the Florentine [Roman] amphitheatre, called Parlagio or Parlascio and situated – so wrote Manni in the 18th. century – "where the houses now curve round from Via dei Vagellai, that is behind the left side of the church of San Simone, to Piazza de' Peruzzi, lengthways, and along its width from Via dell'Anguillara to Piazza Santa Croce, and therefore is it that the church of San Simone is known as "del Parlagio".

We would point out that the Via de' Vagellai mentioned by Manni corresponds to the present Via Torta. *Vagello* was the word for the vats used by the dyers who lived in this quarter. In the 14th. century several important dye-works were established here, belonging to families who became very wealthy through this industry and took part in the government of the city. Today, Via de' Vagellai is a street parallel with Via de' Neri where dye-works formerly existed but which for some time had no specific name of its own.



Geometrical reconstruction of the Parlagio or Florentine amphitheatre made in the 18th. century from authentic traces then still in existence.

Epigraph XXIV. – HUGO OF TUSCANY.

CIASCUN CHE DELLA BELLA INSEGNA PORTA
DEL GRAN BARONE IL CUI NOME E IL CUI PREGIO
LA FESTA DI TOMMASO RICONFORTA,

DA ESSO EBBE MILIZIA E PRIVILEGIO;

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' – 127–130

["Each one that bears the beautiful escutcheon
Of the great baron whose renown and name
The festival of Thomas keepeth fresh,

Knighthood and privilege from him received"].

Longfellow's translation.

In Via del Proconsolo, near the principal entrance to the Badia church.

The "great baron" mentioned by Dante is Hugo, Marquis of Tuscany, son of Hubert of Brandenburg [Vicar of the German Emperor, Otto I] and Countess Willa [1] daughter of Marquis Boniface, Duke of Spoleto and Camerino.

This young Margrave of whose deeds we have, strange to say, no consecutive historical narrative, aud whose very existence is still, in spite of recent research, wrapped in a thick veil of legend, lived in the second half of the 10th. century; that is, in the stormiest and most difficult period of the history of Italy, crushed by foreign domination and especially by that of the German Emperors. They were sad times of inconscient servitude, and of the most humiliating intellectual and religious decadence which encouraged the growth of feudal tyranny, and the spread of heresy, and led to a general corruption of life and manners extending. unfortunately, even to the clergy who bartered the church

benefices and made simony almost an institution. Hugo of Tuscany inherited the vast feudal possessions of his father while still quite young and with skilful diplomacy he increased his power by acquiring the government of Spoleto and Camerino, formerly belonging to his mother's father, the Marquis Boniface. His activity and the force of his authority extended, however, far beyond his own dominions. Sincerely devoted to the House of Saxony, he was Imperial Vicar in Tuscany for Otto II and Otto III and became the faithful friend and most trusted counsellor of the latter Emperor. Hugo was at that time the only Italian Prince capable of making the Imperial authority felt in Italy and with a dim awakening of national feeling, he succeeded in persuading the young and restless Emperor to carry out a policy as favourable as possible to the Italians. A good Christian and sincerely religious, Hugo favoured the Cluniac reform of the Benedictine Order which was intent on changing the corrupt lives of the clergy and above all, on abolishing simony, - two questions of capital importance in those days.

" Hugo of Tuscany did not have a longe life but he acquired European fame as a powerful [2] and pious [3] Prince, with wide authority [4]. His influence on the policy of the Saxon Emperors and his intimate relations with the most representative religious personalities of the day,

must have helped to create this fame. We find him mentioned in the Chronicles and Annals of countries far distant from Italy and Tuscany, and even his contemporaries realized that he was a personage of historic grandeur whose name would go down to posterity. He had not been dead fifty years before the title of "great" was confered upon him by San Pier Damiano who, writing in the second half of the eleventh century, extolled Hugo as a great historical personage ad example of piety, valour and wise administration" [Falce].

Unlike so many of his contemporary feudatories, Dukes, Counts, Marquises and Barons, for the most part ignorant, grasping and dissolute men who tyrannised over the Italian cities and impoverished the land, Hugo governed Tuscany with justice and humanity, so much so that it became known as the least feudal and most distinctively Latin of all the regions of the peninsula [5]. He always favoured Florence by every means in his power, encouraging its slow development and choosing it as his own residence in preference to Lucca which had hitherto been the seat of the Marquisate.

Hugo "the Great" died at Pistoia on December 21st., 1006, [the festival of St. Thomas the Apostle] before reaching his fiftieth year. In fulfilment of his own desire, he was buried in the Badia of Florence which he had lavishly

benefited during his life-time, raising the monastery to great economic and political power. Every year since then the Benedictine monks of the Badia have always said mass for their benefactor on the anniversary of his death and employed an orator to extol his virtues and glorious deeds. But this annual celebration has done less to preserve his memory than the few words in Dante's "Paradiso" where Cacciaguida evokes the "great baron" and refers to the fact that several Florentine families owed their titles of nobility to him [6].
Although the fact is not confirmed by any contemporary writer, it seems that the Marquis Hugo did really confer knighthood on the members of certain families and granted them the privilege of quartering his arms on their shields [7].

In other words: The families of those who bear the arms of the great baron [Hugo of Tuscany], whose name and valour is recalled on the Feast of S. Thomas, received from him [from Hugo] the title of knighthood and other privileges of nobility.

NOTES.

[1] It was Hugo's mother, Countess Willa, who founded the Badia of Florence in 978, under the title of Monastery of Santa Maria. She endowed it liberally and gave it in

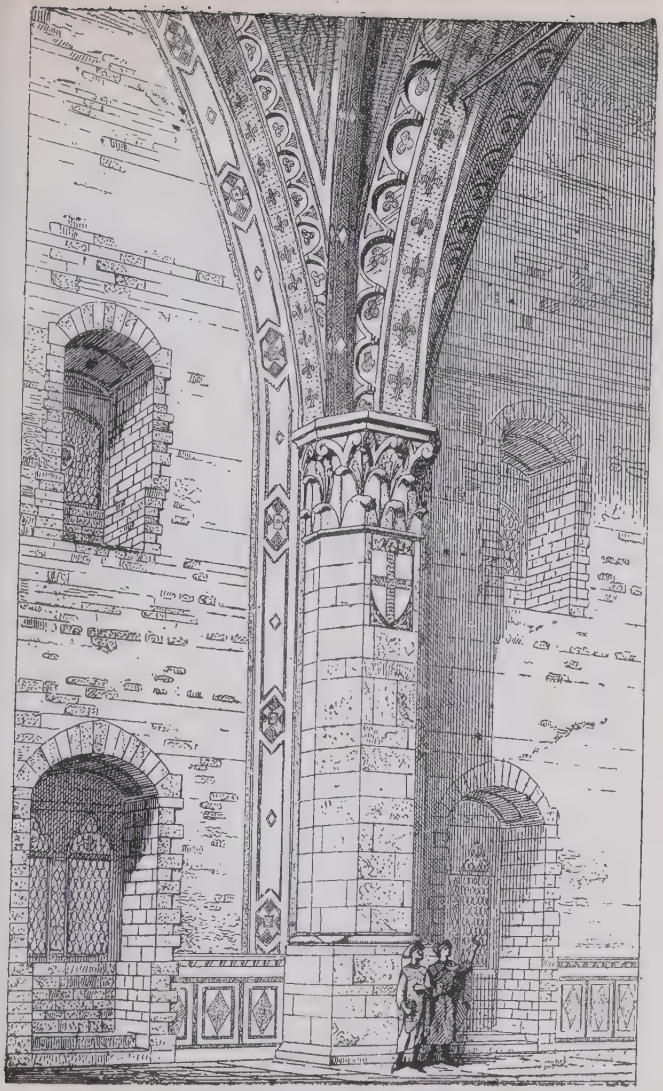
charge to the black Benedictines [also called Cluniacs], monks of piety and doctrine and avowed enemies of simony. This was the first monastery to rise in Florence within the first circuit of walls. It occupied the area between the Bargello and Via dei Magazzini and between Piazza San Firenze and Via Dante Alighieri, including the famous tower "della Castagna", the first official residence of the Priors of the Arts, when they began, in 1252, to govern the Florentine Republic [see Epigraph XIX].

When in 1250 the Commune decided to build the palace first called "of the Captain of the People", then "of the Podestà", and finally "of the Bargello", it appropriated for this purpose the ground facing the Badia Convent. Later, in 1294, the Commune made amends by rebuilding, at its own expence, the whole of the Badia. In the 15th. century, the church was embellished with fine works of Renaissance art and the Benedictines thinking that the simple porphyry tomb of the Marquis Hugo was unworthy of the memory of their munificent benefactor, decided in 1481 to remove his remains to a magnificent monument decorated with sculptures by Mino da Fiesole. The present façade of the church on Via del Proconsolo was originally the back entrance to the Badia. It was made the principal entrance during restorations effected in 1625 when the shape and orientation of the building were greatly altered.

From very early times, a little church called San Stefano del Popolo existed close to the Badia. It was here that in 1373 Boccaccio, by desire of the Commune, began his public readings and explanations of the Divine Commedy. This generous attempt to popularise Dante's works, brought the commentator a good deal of annoyance and fierce attacks from a number of citizens who did not approve of the great Poem being brought to the knowledge of the common people ["il vulgo indegno"]. The readings

were interrupted at the XVII Canto of the Inferno as Boccaccio fell ill and was obliged to retire to Certaldo where he died in 1375.
San Stefano del Popolo which occupied the site of the present Pandolfini chapel, was demolished in the 17th. century.
Lastly we would again recall the fact that before the invention of tower-clocks, the bells of the Badia had the prerogative of chiming the canonical hours by which the Florentine citizen regulated his day [see Epigraph XIX].
The fine old palace of the Bargello, facing the Badia, was rebuilt and enlarged in 1333. Towards the end of the 16th. century it became the residence of the Captain of Justice and part of it was turned into a prison. There is no need to enlarge on the piteous state to which the palace was now reduced and on the barbarous alterations which took place. Not the least piece of vandalism was whitewashing all the frescoes, as a presumed preservative against the spread of epidemics. It was not until 1857 and again in 1865 that this grand historical building was suitably restored and turned into a national museum.

[2] Hugo was nephew of King Hugo dispossessed by Berengarius II, and of Lothaire, King of Italy. His sister Waldrada married the Doge of Venice, Pietro IV Candiano [959–976] one of the most powerful princes in Italy. Hugo himself married Judith, a descendent of Otto of Carinthia, Marquis of Verona and a relative, so it is said, of Conrad II. They had three children of whom history only mentions one, a daughter named Willa who ended her life as Abbess of the convent of Sant'Ilario, in Val di Bidente [Tuscany].
Taking advantage of one of the privileges, most highly prized by the princes of his day, Hugo of Tuscany, coined money in his own name, sometimes adding that of his consort.



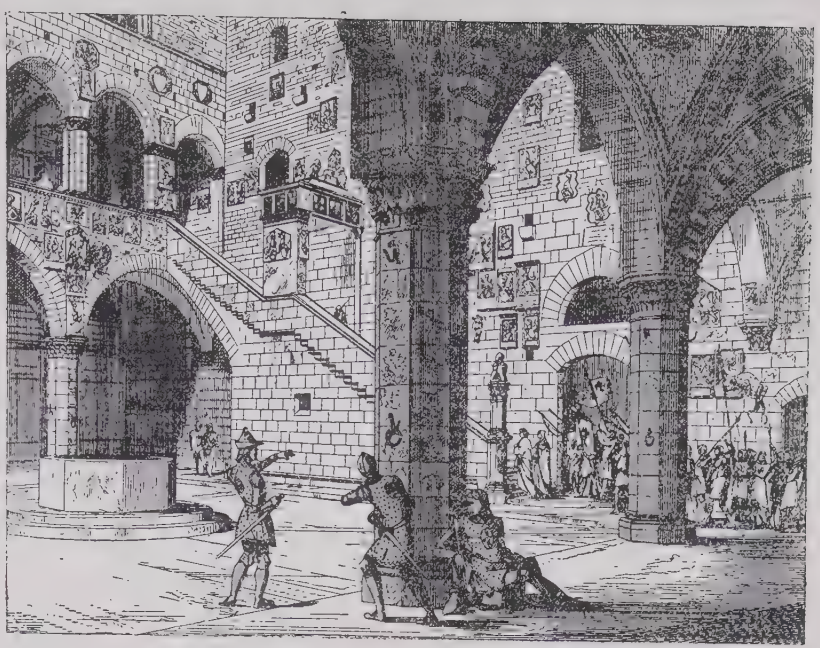
Interior of the Palazzo del Podestà.

[3] Hugo's authority must really have been very great if in 1001 he was able, by persuasive means and without recourse to arms, to free the Emperor Otto III when besieged by the Roman people on the Aventine.

[4] Tradition attributes the foundation of a number of abbeys to Hugo of Tuscany. History, however, only gives as certain the foundation of the celebrated Abbey of Monturi [Poggibonsi], and of the Abbeys of Capolona [Arezzo], Vangadizza [Adria] and Verruca [Pisa], all of which he endowed with great liberality besides granting them numerous privileges.

[5] He generally sided with the people and under his rule taxes were few and not burdensome. "His seneschals were always local men; maidens and widows were free to choose their husbands; markets were held according to the desire and for the benefit of his subjects, from whom no money was ever extorted by force" [Falce].

[6] From the numerous legends surrounding the figure of this great mediaeval prince, we select the one referring to his death, as given by Davidsohn.
"While Hugo was intent on these pious works [the foundation of monasteries] a riot broke out at Pistoia. He hastened there and restored calm, but was suddenly attacked by a violent fever which caused his death after a few days illness. The Florentines who were with him immediately bethought them of a stratagem for conveying his body by stealth back to Florence, being convinced that if once the Pistoiese knew Hugo had died in their city, they would not suffer the corpse to be carried away. So the Florentines moved the body into another room and in the bed of the Marquis they laid one of his henchmen, bidding him tell certain citizens of Pistoia who were coming to visit their Lord, that he



Courtyard of the Palazzo del Podestà [Bargello].

desired to return to Florence, to be among his own people. Then they clothed the body of Hugo and placed it on a horse where it was supported by a robust servant and so they carried him home to Florence".

[7] The "beautiful escutcheon" was formed of seven pallets alternately argent and gules. The Florentine families entitled to quarter these arms were the Pulci, Grandonati, Gandolandi, Della Bella, and Alepri. They all bore the pallets on their shields with certain modifications, perhaps to distinguish one family from another.

Epigraph XXV. – GIANO DELLA BELLA.

CIASCUN CHE DELLA BELLA INSEGNA PORTA
DEL GRAN BARONE . . . . . .
. . . . . .

DA ESSO EBBE MILIZIA E PRIVILEGIO;
AVVEGNA CHE COL POPOL SI RAUNI
OGGI COLUI CHE LA FASCIA COL FREGIO.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 127–132 –

["Each one that bears the beautiful escutcheon
Of the great baron . . . . . .
. . . . . .

Knighthood and privilege from him received;
Though with the populace unites himself;
Today the man who binds it with a border"].

Longfellow's translation.

In Piazza dei Cimatori, at the corner of Via dei Tavolini where the houses of the Della Bella once stood, next to those of the Abati.

This Epigraph alludes to those nobles who went over to the popular party, and especially to Giano Della Bella, a descendant of one of the families ennobled by Hugo, Marquis of Tuscany, as related in the preceding chapter. These families bore the arms granted by the "great Baron", with some slight modification such as the bordure or which Giano della Bella added to his shield. Giano della Bella was a "great and powerful citizen, wise, brave and good, very daring and of noble birth, who placed himself at the head of the popular party of citizen and merchants" in sheer disgust at the continued insolence of the Florentine nobility who became every day more turbulent and aggressive. He worked so hard in favour of the people's cause, that he obtained the promulgation of new laws to strengthen the authority of the citizens and safeguard them from the oppression of the *Grandi*, who were even forbidden to take any further part in the government

of the Commune unless they renounced their nobility and enrolled themselves in one of the people's Guilds [1].

These laws which constitute the reform of 1293 and are famous in the history of Florence as the "Ordinances of Justice" naturally drew on Giano the hatred of all the great families thus humiliated and shorn of their power. Feeling against him rose to such a pitch that Giano, who shrank from being the cause of civil strife and had no great trust in the populace, resolved to leave the city which he had freed from the tyranny of the nobles. This he did on March 3rd. 1295, going into voluntary exile to France, and Florence "repeating ancient examples of blind ingratitude, condemned him for contumacy on March 5th. and confiscated his houses and other property" [Del Lungo].

In other words: Each one [that is, all those who bear the arms of the great baron] had received from him knighthood and the privileges of nobility; although one of them [Giano della Bella], he who encircles the escutcheon with a bordure or, has now made common cause with the people.

NOTES.

[1] Dante, as is well known, was enrolled in the Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries.

The Corporations of Arts and Crafts into which the people of Florence were divided, were originally twelve in number; seven greater Guilds and five lesser ones. The former included Judges and Notaries, Merchants of Calimala [dressers of foreign cloth], Money-changers, Wool-staplers, Physicians and Apothecaries, Silk Merchants and Furriers. The latter, afterwards increased to fourteen, were as follows: Butchers, Blacksmiths, Shoemakers, Carpenters, Dealers in second-hand goods *[rigattieri]*, Wine-dealers, Inn-keepers, Harness-makers, Armourers, Ironmongers, Bakers, Salters, Linen-makers and Masons. Each Guild had its own Captain or "Gonfaloniere", but all depended from one Proconsul. Each had its own residence, and its members were always ready, whenever the great bell tolled, to take up arms and fight against any and every enemy, in defence of liberty.

All the Guilds had their share in the government of the city. The Priors of Liberty were elected from among them but only the greater Guilds had the right to elect the Captain or Gonfaloniere of Justice. It was thanks to these hard-working, thrifty artisan Corporations that Florence was able to bear the heavy expense of defending the city and territory from foreign enemies, while at the same time she beautified her streets and squares with noble monuments. A tangible proof of the great wealth of the Guilds and of their sense of beauty remains in the church of Orsanmichele. The admirable works of art which decorate both the interior and exterior of the building, were all commissioned and paid for by the Corporations.

In process of time the Guilds changed in number and their original character became altered, until in 1532

they lost all their former civic and political importance and ceased to have any influence on the government of the city.

It is generally said that Dante enrolled himself with the Physicians and Apothecaries on account of his knowledge of drawing to which he refers more than once in his writings [..... "I returned to my occupation, that of drawing figures of angels:" *Vita Nuova*, XXXIV] as this Guild included artists. This conjecture is, however, not wholly convincing, as it seems improbable that Dante would have lowered himself officially to a level with painters who were looked upon in those days, as being followers rather of a trade than a profession. On the other hand, it is known that he already enjoyed fame as a student of philosophy to which he devoted himself after the death of Beatrice [..... "I who sought to console myself found not only a remedy for my tears" in frequenting "the Schools of the Religious and the disputations of Philosophers"; *Convivio*, II, XII – 5 and 7]; and if we recollect the close connection between medicine and philosophy during the middle-ages, it is easy to understand Dante's reason for placing himself among Physicians and Apothecaries.

Epigraph XXVI. – BORGO SS. APOSTOLI.

GIÀ ERAN GUALTEROTTI ED IMPORTUNI;
ED ANCOR SARIA BORGO PIÙ QUIETO,
SE DI NUOVI VICIN FOSSER DIGIUNI.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 133–135 –

["Already were Gualterotti and Importuni;
And still more quiet would the Borgo be
If with new neighbours it remained unfed"].

Longfellow's translation.

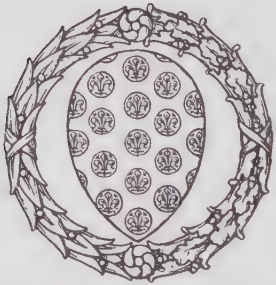
No. 2, in Borgo SS. Apostoli, near Via Por Santa Maria, on the building formerly the Baldovinetti Tower.

In this Epigraph it is still Cacciaguida who is speaking and praising the good old times. He is bent on making Dante, his worthy descendent, realise fully what a state of exemplary peace and prosperity Florence enjoyed in the middle of the 12th. century. To this end he quotes the names of the noblest and most powerful Florentine families who in his day all dwelt together in amity, because the "new folk" from the countryside had not yet come down into the city; that is, the new families who either because they were forced to do so by the Commune, or because they were attracted by the idea of "quick gains", came and settled in Florence bringing with them "confusion of persons". discord and greed.

To give an example of this lamentable state of things Cacciaguida mentions, among others, the names of two very prominent families, the Gualterotti and the Importuni, who were of the old nobility and had their houses in *Borgo* [Borgo

SS. Apostoli] before the Buondelmonti went to live there.

In other words: Those were the days when the Gualterotti and the Importuni were great and honoured and when the Borgo [Borgo SS. Apostoli] where they lived was quiet, which it might be still had they had no fresh neighbours [if the Buondelmonti, the root of so much evil, had not come to settle there].



The arms of the Guild of Money-changers.

Epigraph XXVII. – THE AMIDEI.

LA CASA, DI CHE NACQUE IL VOSTRO FLETO,
PER LO GIUSTO DISDEGNO CHE V' HA MORTI,
E POSE FINE AL VOSTRO VIVER LIETO,
ERA ONORATA ESSA E' SUOI CONSORTI.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 136–139 –

["The house from which is born your lamentation,
Through just disdain that death among you brought
And put an end unto your joyous life,
Was honoured in itself and its companions"].

Longfellow's translation.

No. 1, Via Por Santa Maria, the remains of one of the Amidei towers,

This is one of the few Florentine towers - proud relics of civil warfare - that have come down to us unchanged in external appearance, to testify to the power of their original owners, and it is a particularly characteristic specimen on account of the two great lions' heads that adorn the front.

The meaning of this Epigraph is closely connected with that of the preceding one and it has special reference to the murder of Buondelmonti.

The Amidei [1] a family of high lineage and very ancient origin, were justly indignant at the gross insult put upon them by the vain and flighty Buondelmonte dei Buondelmonti and they revenged themselves by killing him. He broke faith and paid for it with his life but Florence paid for it with her peace [see Epigraph XXVIII].

In other words: The house [the Amidei family] which was the cause of your lamentation, as

their just anger was the beginning of your woes and put an end to all your joyous life, was held in honour with all its connections [in the days of Cacciaguida] [2].

NOTES.

[1] The Amidei were called di Capo di Ponte [of the Bridge-head] because in addition to their castles and vast possessions in Val di Greve, they had palaces and towers in Via Por Santa Maria, near the Ponte Vecchio.

[2] *Consorti* or *Consorterie* was the name given to those groups of rich and powerful families who, although not always sharing the same name, were united by ties of relationship or by political or commercial interests. They generally lived in the same quarter of the city as the head family of the group, often in neighbouring houses. In those days, families, even when divided into several branches, never went far from their original home. They continued to live close to one another and their fortified towers were at once a sign and an instrument of the power of the clan.
The Cerchi houses, for instance, occupied all the area between the present Via dei Cerchi – where there are still traces of their Loggia – and Via S. Procolo [Via dei Giraldi]; and the Medici houses – in later times – began with the building now – wrongly – called Palazzo Riccardi, where the head of the family lived, and extended beyond the Canto di Bernardetto dei Medici, at the corner of Via Cavour and Via Guelfa.

Epigraph XXVIII. – THE BUONDELMONTI.

O BUONDELMONTE . . . . . .

MOLTI SAREBBON LIETI, CHE SON TRISTI,
SE DIO T' AVESSE CONCEDUTO AD EMA
LA PRIMA VOLTA CHE A CITTÀ VENISTI.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 140–144 –

[O Buondelmonte. . . . . .

Many would be rejoicing who are sad,
If God had thee surrendered to the Ema
The first time that thou camest to the city "].

Longfellow's translation.

No. 7, Borgo SS. Apostoli, where the Buondelmonti had their houses [1].

This apostrophe is addressed to Buondelmente Buondelmonti, the handsome youth whose name is so tragically linked with the history of Florence. He was killed to avenge a private wrong but the consequences of the crime were of such a nature that they soon spread beyond the narrow confines of the city and influenced the political vicissitudes, not only of Tuscany but of the whole of Italy.

"Messer Buondelmonte of the noble house of the Buondelmonti, a handsome and splendid knight, had promised to take to wife a maiden of the house of the Amidei. One day while he was riding through the city, a lady of the house of the Donati, named Aldruda, called to him and descending the stairs she entered into conversation with him and scoffed at him because he was about to marry the Amidei who was neither beautiful nor rich enough for him. "I", she added, "had kept this my daughter for you", and she showed him the maiden,

who had followed her. Now this girl was of rare beauty and Buondelmonte was so taken by her that, forgetting all about the Amidei and his plighted troth and the insult he was inflicting and the risk he ran, he answered that things were not so far advanced but what they might yet go back, and not long afterwards he married her. The Amidei swore to be revenged for the shame put upon them and they were egged on by the Uberti and other kinsfolk and many of the most ancient and noble families plotted together as to how they should punish Buondelmonte; and as they were disputing among themselves, Mosca dei Lamberti rose up and said the evil word: "Once done, 'tis done with", meaning to say that they should kill him. They lost no time, for on the morning of Easter Day [1215], being assembled in the house of the Amidei at Santo Stefano, they saw Buondelmonte coming from Oltrarno [the further side of the river] on a white palfrey, nobly arrayed in new white apparel, and they went towards him and met him just as he crossed the Ponte Vecchio, at the foot of a statue of Mars that stood there, a relic of paganism; and Schiatta degli Uberti dragged him from his horse while Mosca dei Lamberti and Lambertuccio degli Amidei flung themselves on him and wounded him and Oderigo dei Fifanti opened his veins and finished him off" [Gino Cappponi].

The corpse of the ill-fated youth was placed on an open bier with his bride supporting the head of her murdered husband and carried in procession through the streets of Florence. The tragic sight roused pity and indignation in all who saw it and fully realised the effect on which the Buondelmonti and their friends had been counting, for the whole city flew to arms and split up into two parties, one taking part for the Buondelmonti and the other for the Uberti. The names of Guelph and Ghibelline, already used in other parts of Italy to distinguish the adherents of the Italian Popes from those of the German Emperors [2] were adopted conventionally in Florence, the Buondelmonti faction being called Guelphs while their opponents - with the Uberti at their head - were known as Ghibellines.

The story told by the Florentine chroniclers of the Ponte Vecchio tragedy and the incidents leading up to it show that it was a catastrophic culmination to long-standing enmity between some of the noblest and wealthiest families in Florence. When Buondelmonte Buondelmonti promised to marry Reparata degli Amidei, he was not in love with her; he was persuaded into the marriage by his friends and relations as a means of making peace with the Amidei family and above all with the girl's uncle, Oderigo dei Fifanti, who had reasons of his

own for nursing a grudge against the Buondelmonti. Here is the story as told by the historian Piccioli:

"Mazzingo di Tegrimo dei Mazzinghi having been made a knight, he, according to the custom of the time, invited all the principal members of the Florentine aristocracy to a banquet at Campi. While the gentlemen were at table a jester snatched up the plate of Uberto degli Infangati and removed it from him as he was about to eat. Buondelmonte Buondelmonti who was sitting to Uberto, grew angry at the rudeness to his friend and Oddo di Arrigo [Oderigo] Fifanti, a proud, hot-tempered man, started quarrelling with both Uberto and Buondelmonte. This led to an uproar in the midst of which Oddo flung a plateful of meat into Uberto's face, a thing which greatly displeased all the company. When they rose from table Buondelmonte wounded Fifanti with a knife and the latter returning to Florence called together his kinsfolk to counsel him how he might be avenged".

The proposed marriage only delayed the inevitable crisis, for when Buondelmonte broke faith with the Amidei, the desire for vengeance became uncontrollable and ended, as we have seen, in his assassination.

This might seem merely a tragic episode in one of those blood feuds common to all times and

all countries, especially during the middle-ages, but the terrible consequences that ensued give it a deeper significance and permit us to conjecture that Dante's apostrophe to Buondelmonte may have a wider application than is implied in the actual words.

It is clear that the rivalry between the principal families in Florence was fomented by the partisans of the Imperial policy and that the murderers of Buondelmonte - Lambertuccio degli Amidei, the father of the injured girl, and her uncle, Oderico dei Fifanti - were only the actors in a tragedy which had been craftily planned and worked up by Schiatta degli Uberti who was a master in the iniquitous art of fanning the flames of hatred, and was seconded in all his evil designs by his worthy follower, Mosca dei Lamberti.

It was a considerable victory for these two to have succeeded in dividing the city into two distinct parties, thus preparing the ground for the accomplishment of their hidden aims. The famous phrase " Once done, 'tis done with ", was perhaps understood by the real plotters to be a hint about future developments far more important than a series of fresh quarrels between rival families. Here in the absence of documents, facts speak for themselves.

Buondelmonte's violent death followed by further acts of vengeance on both sides would not

in itself have been anything unusual in Florence. There had been continual party strife in the city, fomented by the Uberti, since 1177 and the citizens would fly to arms almost daily, on the most futile pretexts [3]. "One day they would fight" says Malespini, "and the next day they would eat and drink together, each side boasting of their strength and prowess in the different engagements" [4].

But Florence, very little tainted with German blood and sincerely religious in feeling, leaned towards the Papacy, though she had not yet declared herself openly against the Empire, and in 1198 she entered the Guelph League organised by some of the Tuscan Communes [5] for mutual defence against the exactions of the German Emperors and their insatiable cupidity. The Republic threw all its weight, in fact, on the Guelph side and the weight of the most thriving and powerful Commonwealth in central Italy was quite sufficient, as the Ghibellines were well aware, to turn the scale against the Empire. Hence the continuous efforts of the Florentine Ghibellines to force a breach in the solid walls of the Tuscan League. The murder of "the predestined victim", Buondelmonte, at the foot of the mutilated statue of a pagan god, "seems like the opening rite of civil discord whereby the barbarous names of Guelph and Ghibelline were introduced for the first time into our city

with political results of the highest importance for the history of Florence and, generally speaking, for that of all Italy ". [Del Lungo].
Dante, familiar from his childhood with the evil consequences of the atrocious crime and the horrors to which it gave birth, placed it on record in his Divine Poem which is not only a stupendous work of art but an admirable synthesis of the history of mediaeval Italy up to his own day.

In other words: O Buondelmonte, many who are now sad, would be rejoicing if God had permitted thee to be drowned in the waters of the Ema, the first time that thou camest into Florence [6].

NOTES.

[1] " In the year of Christ, 1135, the fortress of Montebuono [in Valdigreve] belonged to the house of the Buondelmonti and from the name of this castle the Buondelmonti took their sirname; and by reason of its strength and because the road to Florence ran at the foot thereof, the Buondelmonti took toll of travellers the which thing the Florentines did not desire nor would they tolerate such a fortress hard by the city. So in the month of June they went hither with an army and took it and destroyed the fortress and obliged the Buondelmonti to come and live in Florence " [Villani]. The Buondelmonti first lived on the south side of the Arno but later they settled permanently in Borgo SS. Apostoli.

[2] Generally speaking, the partisans of the Empire were called Ghibellines while the Guelphs were those who upheld the Papacy, but it often happened that Guelph and Ghibelline factions started in some city owing to private enmity between two families and then the parties not infrequently took the names of these local houses. At Bologna, for instance, the Guelphs were called Geremei and the Ghibellines Lambertazzi; at Perugia they were known as Blacks and Whites; at Rome as Savini and Savelli, at Siena as Tolomei and Salimbeni, etc.
"The cursed party names of Guelph and Ghibelline" says Villani, "are said to have originated in Germany". They are Italianised forms of the German names Welf and Weiblingen which were adopted as war-cries during the conflict between Conrad of Suabia, Lord of Weiblingen and Henry the Proud, Duke of Bavaria, of the house of Welf.

[3] Of 72 noble Florentine families enumerated by the historian Malespini, 39 were Guelph and 33 Ghibelline. "And so the city of Florence was divided into two parties to such an extent that there was neither man nor woman, great or small, priest or friar who did not belong to either the one or the other".

[4] Villani relates that at Rome in 1220, one of the Florentine ambassadors while feasting with a cardinal, begged the gift of a certain very beautiful little dog and his host promised to grant it. The next day the Pisan ambassador happened to make the same request and the cardinal promised the dog likewise to him. But the Florentine being the first to send for the dog, actually obtained it. This led to quarrels and violence between the two ambassadors and their trains, egged on by the Oderigo Fifanti already named, and brought about the

war between Florence and Pisa in 1222. Nor were the Florentines the only ones to start quarrelling about trifles. A bucket which the Bolognese stole from the Modenese led to hostilities between the two cities; Anghiari and San Sepolcro flew to arms about a padlock and Perugia and Chiusi fought about a ring said to have belonged to the Virgin.

[5] The cities of the Guelph League were Florence, Lucca, Siena, Volterra, Prato and Samminiato. Pisa and Pistoia did not belong to it as they sided for the Emperor.

[6] The Ema is the little stream that is crossed in coming from Montebuoni to Florence "and in which" according to an ancient commentator whose information is not corroborated by any other historiau – "Messer Buondelmonte was very nearly drowned the first time he forded it on his way to the city" [Buti].

The assassination of Buondelmonte Buondelmonti at the foot of the statue believed to be of Mars.
[From a miniature in the Villani Codex belonging to the Vatican].

Epigraph XXIX. – THE MUTILATED STONE.

MA CONVENIESI A QUELLA PIETRA SCEMA
CHE GUARDA IL PONTE, CHE FIORENZA FESSE
VITTIMA NELLA SUA PACE POSTREMA.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 145–147 –

["But it behoved the mutilated stone
Which guards the bridge, that Florence should provide
A victim in her latest hour of peace"].

Longfellow's translation.

At the foot of the Ponte Vecchio [on the north side of the river] where the porticoes begin and where the mutilated statue, at the foot of which Buondelmonte was murdered, is believed to have stood.

A great deal has been written and imagined about this statue which guarded "the bridge" for centuries and to which a wholly legendary origin and significance have been attributed. The famous Florentine chronicler, Giovanni Villani, Dante's contemporary, was only repeating a very old tradition when he affirmed that it was really a marble image of the god Mars which came from the temple of Mars, afterwards transformed into the Florentine Baptistery. This tradition was so deeply rooted in people's minds that Dante accepted it unquestioningly, and if in the above *terzina* he only refers to the statue as the "mutilated stone" – that is, broken and worn-away – he does not hesitate earlier in the same Canto to describe the city's boundaries as lying "between Mars and the Baptist", meaning between the Ponte Vecchio where stood the statue of Mars and the Piazza del Duomo, the site of the Baptistery. The earliest commentators of the Divine Comedy follow this reading; indeed, one of them, the

Anonimo Fiorentino, calls the statue "a stone image of Mars on horseback.... which time had worn down so that the head of Mars could no longer be discerned; from the waist downward it was easy to make out the figure of a man on horseback".

As it has been proved that the Baptistery was always a Christian Church from its very foundation, [see Epigraph VIII], the ancient legend of the provenance of the statue falls to the ground and it only remains to explain its real origin and significance.

It was not a statue of Mars. That is clear because the fierce pagan god was never represented on horseback either by Greeks or Romans, but always on foot, or at most, seated on a chariot. The Florentine image consisted most likely of a high narrow pedestal surmounted by a horse in the act of galopping and on the horse the torso of a knight of which all that could be clearly made out was the body from the waist downward and a fragment of a pointed shield. This imaginary reconstruction of the "mutilated stone" finds confirmation in one of the miniatures of the ancient Villani Codex, formerly in the Chigi Library at Rome and now in the Vatican Library. This miniature reproduces the murder of Buondelmonte with the slope of the Ponte Vechio as a background and a column surmounted by a horse galop-

ping, ridden by a warrior armed with shield and sword.

We known that after the fall of the Roman Empire, it was the custom in Italian cities conquered by barbarian invaders, to raise equestrian statues of a special kind in honour of their rulers, and therefore "there is nothing" says Davidsohn, "against the idea that a similar monument may have also been erected in Florence in honour of some Gothic king and that this monument is the statue in question" [see Epigraph XXVIII] [1]. The inundation of 1178 destroyed the Roman bridge and also the statue which had stood for centuries at the bridge-head [on the south side of the Arno] to the right of those entering Florence. When after some years, the statue was salvaged from the bed of the Arno, in a battered and mutilated condition, the Florentines who had a superstitious dread of the image, insisted on re-erecting it on the north side, at the foot of the Ponte Vecchio, facing Por Santa Maria, where it remained until 1333. Dante who saw it there, confirms the fact in the XIII Canto of the Inferno, in the following words:

> "*And were it not that on the pass of Arno*
> *Some glimpses of him are remaining still....*".

The Florentines believed firmly that any insult offered to the statue would react on the citizens,

causeng them to suffer defeat or some other misfortune [2].

The great inundation of 1333 [see Epigraph IV] again swept away the Ponte Vecchio and the "mutilated stone" and after that the popular superstition died out, for no one gave it another thought. However, if the unlucky image has been lost for ever amid the sands of the Arno, its memory has been preserved in Dante's verses, overflowing with bitterness as he thinks of the sad vicissitudes of his beloved city with which this mysterious stone symbol is indissolubly connected.

In other words: It behoved [it was necessary] that to that mutilated stone [then believed to be an image of Mars] which guards the bridge [the Ponte Vecchio] Florence should make sacrifice in her latest hour of peace [that is, her last days of tranquillity for after that she always lived in war].

NOTES.

[1] Traces of similar monuments are found at Rome, Verona and Pavia.

[2] Notwithstanding this belief, it is said that in the month of March, if the season was good, the citizens hung garlands round the statue; if the weather was unfavourable, they covered it with mud.

Epigraph XXX. – THE ARMS OF FLORENCE.

VID' IO FIORENZA IN SÌ FATTO RIPOSO,
CHE NON AVEA CAGIONE ONDE PIANGESSE:

CON QUESTE GENTI VID' IO GLORIOSO
E GIUSTO IL POPOL SUO TANTO, CHE IL GIGLIO
NON ERA AD ASTA MAI POSTO A RITROSO,

NÈ PER DIVISION FATTO VERMIGLIO.

– DANTE – PAR. 'XVI' 149–154 –

[" Florence beheld I in so great repose,
That no occasion had she whence to weep;

With all these families beheld so just
And glorious her people, that the lily
Never upon the spear was placed reversed,

Nor by division was vermilion made "].

Longfellow's translation.

In the first courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio, under the arcades on the right-hand side.

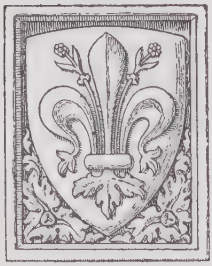
These are the last lines of the beautiful Canto in which Dante, through his ancestor, Cacciaguida, praises many of the ancient families of Florence and, looking back with regret to the good old times, is overcome with just indignation as he thinks of the tragic vicissitudes of his beloved city ruined by the fatality of political strife.

Party hatred had not even left untouched the city arms for in 1251 when the victorious Guelphs regained possession of the government of Florence they refused to have the same shield as their adversaries, so the Ghibelline device of a white lily on a red field was changed to that of a red lily on a white field which became eventually, with the establishment of the Guelph power, the recognized emblem of the Commune. Those were savage times, when victory was held to justify the most cruel, inhuman reprisals. Thus a victorious leader, having captured his enemy's standard, would place it up-side-down

upon the flag-staff and drag it through the streets as a sign of contempt for the vanquished.

In other words: I saw Florence - says Cacciaguida - so peaceful that she had no cause for grief or tears: with all these families [he alludes to those already mentioned in the Canto] I saw her people so glorious and so just, that not only was their ensign never placed reversed upon the staff [in sign of defeat] but neither was the lily changed from white to red through division of parties.

NOTES.



The Arms of Florence.

[1] After the defeat at Montaperti [See Epigraph III] the Sienese army returned in triumph to Siena preceded by the Florentine Carroccio and with a number of prisoners chained together who were received with insults by the populace. Jacopino Rangoni, the leader of the army of Florence, who the day before the battle had sent an envoy to the Sienese advising them to surrender on ignominious terms, was subjected to the supreme insult of being seated backwards on an ass with the great standard of Florence fastened to its tail and dragged contemptuonsly through the streets of Siena; another ass bore the "Martinella" or war-bell of the Florentines.

Epigraph XXXI. – DANTE'S HOPE.

SE MAI CONTINGA CHE IL POEMA SACRO,
AL QUALE HA POSTO MANO E CIELO E TERRA,
SÌ CHE M' HA FATTO PER PIÙ ANNI MACRO,

VINCA LA CRUDELTÀ CHE FUOR MI SERRA
DEL BELLO OVILE OV' IO DORMII AGNELLO,
NIMICO AI LUPI CHE GLI DANNO GUERRA;

CON ALTRA VOCE OMAI, CON ALTRO VELLO
RITORNERÒ POETA; ED IN SUL FONTE
DEL MIO BATTESMO PRENDERÒ IL CAPPELLO

– DANTE – PARA 'XXV' 1–9 –

[" If e' er it happen that the Poem Sacred,
To which both heaven and earth have set their hand,
So that it many a year hath made me lean,

O' ercome the cruelty that bars me out
From the fair sheepfold, where a lamb I slumbered,
An enemy to the wolves that war upon it,

With other voice forthwith, with other fleece,
Poet will I return, and at my font
Baptismal will I take the laurel crown "].

Longfellow's translation.

In Piazza San Giovanni, engraved on the pavement at the foot of the Baptistery, facing the Bigallo [south side].

These solemn lines inscribed on the pavement at the foot of the Baptistery, on the south-east side, open the XXV Canto of the Paradiso, the "Canto of Hope", in which St. James questions Dante on this virtue. The thoughts of the "Singer of the Universe" turn again with all the tender yearning and regret of an exile, to his ungrateful birthplace, and he wistfully hopes that in acknowledgement of the Poem written "in the language of the country, and dealing with the supernatural mysteries dear to the heart of the people", he may obtain from the Commune of Florence the supreme grace of being recalled from exile and crowned with the poet's wreath of laurel in San Giovanni, the church that had witnessed his baptism. With his heart full of love and longing for his native city, the "magnanimous exile" makes an appeal of extraordinary pathos which has perhaps no equal either in our own literature or in that of any other country [1].

In other words: Should it ever happen that my Poem - which treats of sacred subjects and for which both Earth and Heaven have furnished material [Earth because it deals with the actions and customs of men, Heaven because it treats of supernatural mysteries and the sanctity of religious dogmas], and through which my strength has diminished year by year [I have wasted away], - avails to overcome the cruelty of my fellow-citizens [the Black Guelphs] who have shut me out of the fair sheepfold [have exiled me from Florence] where I dwelt in youth and childhood, an enemy to the wolves [the Florentines] who never cease waging war on it [on the city with their factious strife] - I shall return with another voice [with the title of Poet], with another mien [older or invested with new dignity], and at the baptismal font [in San Giovanni] I shall receive the cap [a cap given to those who receive the poet's crown, or perhaps Dante uses the word as a symbol of the crown itself].

NOTES.

[1] Dante Alighieri, the first Italian national poet, who was to become the glory not only of Florence but of Italy and the world, died at Ravenna in 1321, aged fifty-six [see Epigraph VII]. He died outside the "fair sheepfold", his Poem not having availed to overcome the cruelty of

the "wolves", the Black Guelphs who having taken possession of the government of the city, had hunted him out like any common malefactor. Party spite never ceased venting itself against the great exile not only while he was alive but even after his death, for although amnesties were granted to others, no amnesty was ever granted to Dante and twenty years after he was lying in his tomb he was still mentioned in public acts as "an enemy to Guelphs and guilty of barratry during his Priorship".

"The blood of the Black Guelphs" justly says Del Lungo "still flowed in the veins of those who sat in the city's Councils".

It was not until half a century later that the Signoria, yielding to the express desire of the Florentines, gave Boccaccio permission [in 1373] to hold a course of lectures on the Divine Comedy in the little church of Santo Stefano del Popolo [see Epigraph XXIV], which were officially described as "a moral and rhetorical exposition for the benefit of the unlearned, of the book vulgarly known as "el Dante". But if the rulers of the Republic maintained their enmity towards Dante, the people always loved him, for the Poet, although of a noble family, had fully accepted the Ordinances of Justice [promulgated in 1293 and remodelled with his intervention in 1295] both in letter and in spirit and had made himself one with the people by enrolling himself in the Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries [see Epigraph XXV]. Whenever he was present in Council, he invariably showed a conciliatory spirit and a just recognition of the people's rights. This alone would have been enough to secure him their sympathy and affection but in addition there was his wonderful Poem, later called Divine, written not in Latin, the language of the scholars, but in the vulgar tongue as it was spoken every day in Florence. The Commedia of which, according to Boccaccio, Dante

wrote the first seven Cantos in Florence before his exile, was popularly known during the Poet's lifetime. "The allusions in the Divina Commedia" wrote Ugo Foscolo a century ago, "which are so obscure to scholars, were perfectly clear in his own day even to the common people who greatly relished their satire". In any case, the people, always friendly to Dante, held him in reverent and affectionate remembrance and it was they, and not the Signoria as has been erroneously stated and repeated up to the present day, who initiated the first act of spontaneous gratitude towards the Poet's memory.

This was carried out twenty-nine years after his death by the Captains of the "Compagnia dei Laudesi" [a religious confraternity] of Orsanmichele, an essentially artisan church [see Epigraph XXV]. They placed ten gold florins in Boccaccio's hands and begged him to convey them to Dante's daughter, Beatrice, a poor nun in the convent of Santo Stefano dell'Ulivo at Ravenna, as a token of their appreciation of her loving care for her father in his last days when lonely and broken by nineteen years of unjust and humiliating exile. How greatly he suffered, how much he longed for a sight of the distant city he would see no more, we know from his own words in *De Vulgari Eloquio* [II, 6]: "Of all who in this world are deserving of compassion, the most to be pitied are those who languishing in exile, never see their own country again, save in dreams".

Dante's exile came to an end rather more than half a century ago. That his bones should rest at Ravenna and not at Florence, is of little moment. Since the Unity of the nation, he sleeps at last in peace surrounded by the religious love of all Italians, in that greater country that he loved so well and whose beauty he never tired of praising: Italy.

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Epigraph III . . . First courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio.
„ XIX . . First courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio.
„ XXX. . First courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio.
„ XXV. . Piazza de' Cimatori [Via dei Tavolini].
„ XVIII . Via dei Tavolini [corner of Via de' Cerchi].
„ XIV . . Via Dante Alighieri [church of the Badia].
„ VIII . . Via Dante Alighieri [On Dante's house].
„ IX . . . No. 10, Via dei Tavolini.
„ XV. . . The Corso [Canto dei Pazzi].
„ XVII. . No. 2, Corso.
„ XIII . . No. 4, Corso.
„ XII. . . No. 5, Corso.
„ I . . . . No. 14, Corso.
„ XXI . . Via dell' Oche.
„ XXII. . No. 17, Via dell' Oche.
„ II. . . . No. 5, Via Calzaioli.
„ XXIV . Via del Proconsolo [Church of the Badia].
„ XVI . . No. 3, Via degli Speziali].
„ XX. . . Via de' Lamberti [Corner of Pellicceria].
„ VII. . . Baptistery, north side.
„ XXXI . Baptistery, south side.
„ V. . . . Via dei Cerretani [Church of Santa Maria Maggiore].
„ VI . . . No. 1, Via Tornabuoni.
„ XXVI . No. 2, Borgo SS. Apostoli.
„ XXVIII No. 7, Borgo SS. Apostoli.
„ XXVII. No. 1, Via Por Santa Maria.
„ IV . . . Loggia of Ponte Vecchio.
„ XXIX . Ponte Vecchio [Via degli Archibusieri].
„ XXIII . Borgo de' Greci [Piazza San Firenze].
„ XI . . . Tower of the Zecca Vecchia.
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The illustrations marked by a short line are from original drawings by Professor Carlo Guerrini; the one marked by two lines is by the architect, Professor Chiaramonti; those marked by an asterisk are from drawings by Giulio Giannini Junior.

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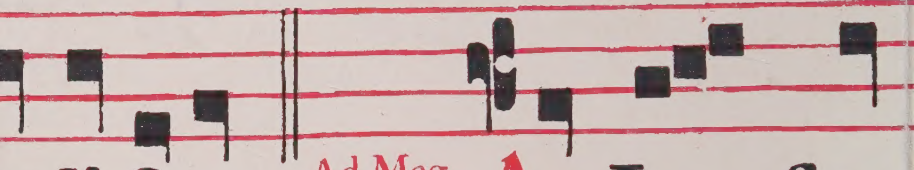

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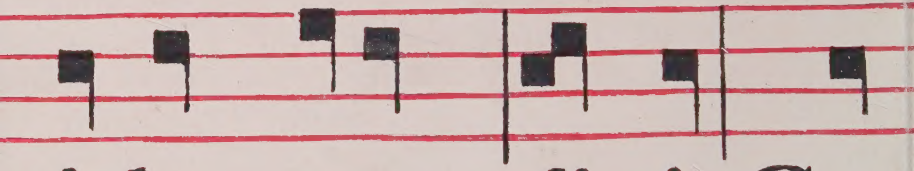

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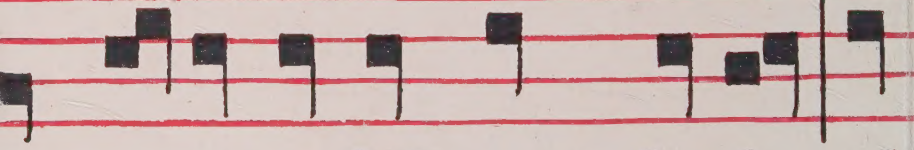

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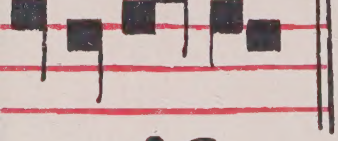

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